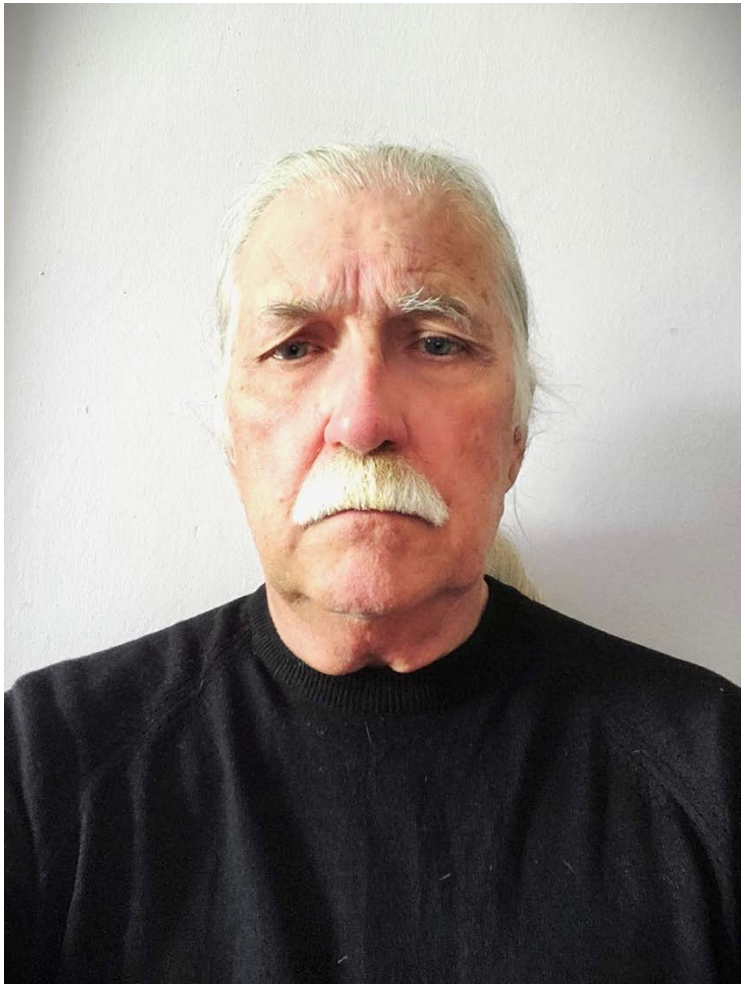
Karl Orend, Publisher

Remembrances of Luminaries Past



Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno

Remembrances of Luminaries Past

Edited, with an Afterword, by Karl Orend

Alyscamps Press, Paris

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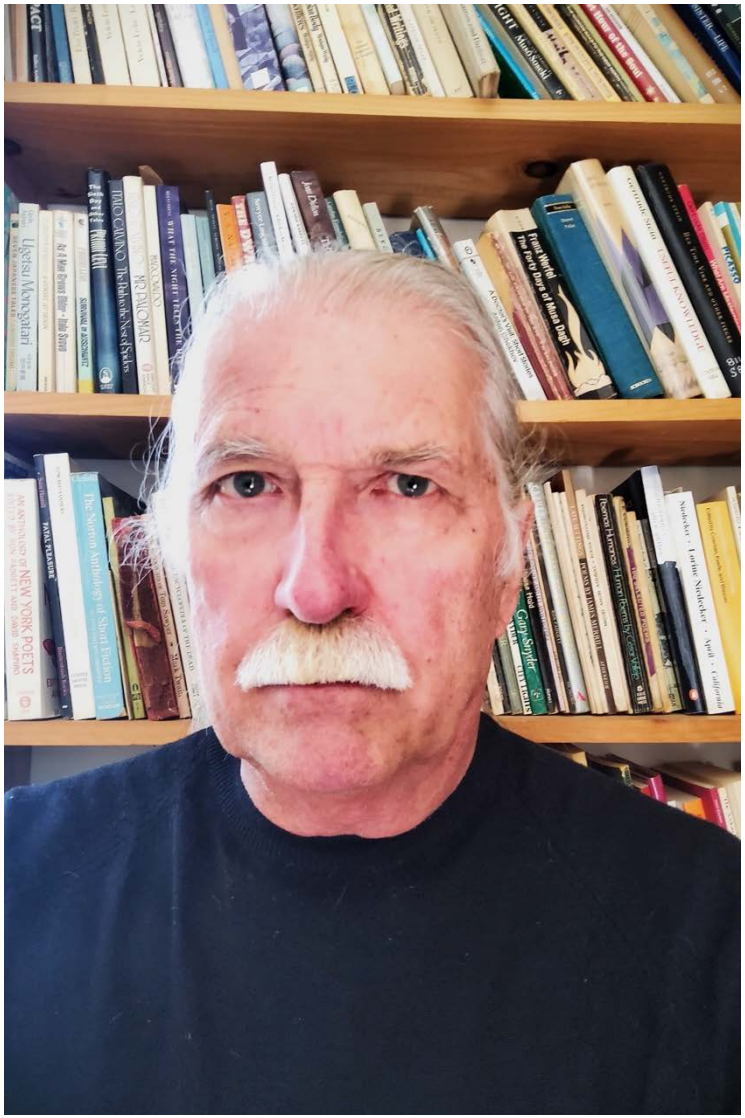
For Patricia Pruitt

In Memoriam



Preface

I have been exceedingly fortunate over more than five decades to have had friendships with luminaries. This collection of remembrances is an homage to some of those who were willing to spend time with me, tell me their stories, and invite me to participate in their lives. I am grateful for the experience, and often rather baffled that they were willing, despite busy schedules and their prestige, to allow me entrance.

I got to know several of them initially through interviews for my biography of Paul Bowles, or for my group portrait of American writers in Paris in the immediate post-World War II period. I didn't expect that we would create a rapport that would extend — except for Paul Bowles — long after the books had been written and published.

I began writing most of the essays in this book at the invitation of editors who wanted texts after the deaths of these giants that were more personal than obituaries. I was, at first, reluctant to supply them. In 1997, after Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs had both died, I was approached by

several news organizations to say a few words about them. I complied but found it rather distasteful to reduce either of these monumental writers to a minute or so of commentary.

With the death of Paul Bowles in 1999, my aversion to boiling down a lifetime of achievement to a few phrases grew exponentially. Indeed, as an avalanche of news outlets, in the U.S. and abroad, descended upon me, all asking the same questions, all wanting me, as briefly as possible, to weigh in on Paul, I became increasingly despondent. I found it at worst ghoulish, at best superficial. I made up my mind that I would henceforth have nothing to do with offering a few post-mortem words about anyone I'd known.

But then Seamus Heaney died, and I was asked to contribute a piece to my local newspaper about him. I initially declined, but at the urging of my late wife, Patricia Pruitt, I decided to reconsider. "No one wants you to offer a sound bite or write a *Times* obit," she said. "Write, on your own terms who Seamus was for you. And for me. Think of it as tribute, as a unique insight. Sing Seamus."

And so, I did. And then I did for others. On my terms. Not glorified obituaries, but songs, without a list of their accomplishments or inventory-like sketches of their lives. In following Patricia's advice, I wrote simply about who they were for me, as my dear friends.

Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno

Turners Falls, Massachusetts

Remembrances of Luminaries Past

George Whitman in conversation with Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno shortly after a major fire at Shakespeare and Company, in 1990. Karl Orend, Manager of Shakespeare and Company and publisher of Alyscamps Press, in the doorway.

Salut George Whitman

(On the Occasion of his becoming an Officer of l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France, 2009).

In 1975, I crossed the threshold of the famous Paris bookstore and literary landmark Shakespeare and Company, at 37 rue de la Bûcherie, for the first time. I was several decades too late to browse in the original and legendary bookshop of the same name, founded in 1919 by expatriate bookseller Sylvia Beach, which was both the gathering place for the Lost Generation and the original publisher of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Rather, it was its second incarnation that opened in 1951 under the able direction of another American expat, George Whitman, originally from Salem, Massachusetts that drew me in. Originally founded as le Mistral, George Whitman took over the name of Sylvia Beach's store upon her death, in 1964. By 1975 his incarnation had become venerable itself.

Whitman's store had the dual reputation as the place in Paris to buy English-language books and as

a crash pad for all who wandered through the City of Light. My first impressions were not positive. While the bookstore was impressive, it was mobbed by throngs of English-speaking backpackers, who seemed more interested in chatting with each other than perusing the bookshelves.

At the desk, sipping a cup of iced tea, was George Whitman, barking out orders to one and all. I stayed for a while, but finally was driven out by the clientele. At the time, I must admit, I was something of a snob. I was in Paris to write a thesis and fancied myself more European than American. I was sure that my time was better spent at the Bibliothèque Nationale, or at the great Paris bookstores Gibert Jeune and Gibert Joseph on the boulevard Saint-Michel or soaking up the atmosphere in cafés.

It wasn't until the late 80s that I came to realize that I had missed out on something special by my unwillingness to meet and talk with George Whitman. At that time, I was writing *The Continual Pilgrimage*, about American writers in Paris after World War II, and was spending my time talking to people who were there in the 1950s.

Allen Ginsberg was the first one who remonstrated me for not getting friendly with George when I was in Paris. George Plimpton, founder of *The Paris Review* was less critical, but said that George was an essential part of the story of the second wave. Gregory Corso simply asked me how I had managed to miss George. Finally, Lawrence Ferlinghetti made it clear that George was *the* one to talk to. And so, in 1990, my wife Patricia Pruitt and I arrived in Paris so that I could research my book "on location."

After a week or so in Paris, we finally made our way to Shakespeare and Co. I introduced myself and Patricia to the 78-year-old George Whitman and told him that Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti had sent me. Ferlinghetti was George's oldest friend, having dated his sister at college. That evening, we became George's dinner guests; by that night we had become residents in the upstairs of the bookstore in his apartment. He gave us his bed: a queen, with a green velvet cover. Over the next couple of days, we both fell in love with George and his bookstore.

Because we had planned to journey to Spain with friends from Paris, we soon bade George and

Shakespeare & Co farewell, but I promised to return after our trip to Spain. (Patricia, alas! had to fly back to Boston).

I made good on my word, and George made good on his promise to install me in the fabled "writer's room," where a host of luminaries from Lawrence Durrell to Anaïs Nin, J.P. Donleavy, Brenden Behan, William Saroyan, Julio Cortazar, Jim Morrison, and Ferlinghetti had previously stayed. The bookstore had even been the favorite English-language haven of many French writers, including Simone de Beauvoir, Claude Lanzmann, Georges Perec, and François Truffaut. It was about as good as it could get. The walls of my room were lined with extraordinary books, including first editions of Joyce's *Ulysses*, Stein's *Making of Americans*, not to mention firsts by Burroughs, Scott Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Woolf, David Gascoyne, Louis Aragon, Chester Himes, Henry Miller, etc.

Each morning George would bring me a new book that he thought would be useful to what I was writing; that evening he'd quiz me as to whether I'd read them. (I had). We also spent hours going through his old photos. Many of these extraordinary photographs ended up in my book. But aside from these treasures, I realized that the greatest treasure was George.

George Whitman remains the most generous man I ever met. He extended his hospitality to writers from James Baldwin, Ted Joans, Peter Matthiessen, Richard Wright, William Styron, Langston Hughes, Ray Bradbury, Alberto Moravia, André Malraux, and Jack Kerouac, and hundreds more, to every next great wave of literary makers and shakers; he dedicated his life to the cause of literature; he was even more dedicated to mankind. His door was open to anyone (though he may have asked you to take a bath). I also came to realize that my snobbism in the mid-70s had probably cost me some extraordinary encounters.

During my stay there, I became close with some of the Shakespeare expat denizens, many of whom are still close friends. Indeed, Karl Orend, who eventually spent ten years as manager of the shop, and with whom I spent a great deal of time, went on to become the publisher of Alyscamps Press, and in turn published works by Patricia and myself and an amazing number of writers – ranging from Nobel winners to new voices. Our collaboration has lasted thirty years.

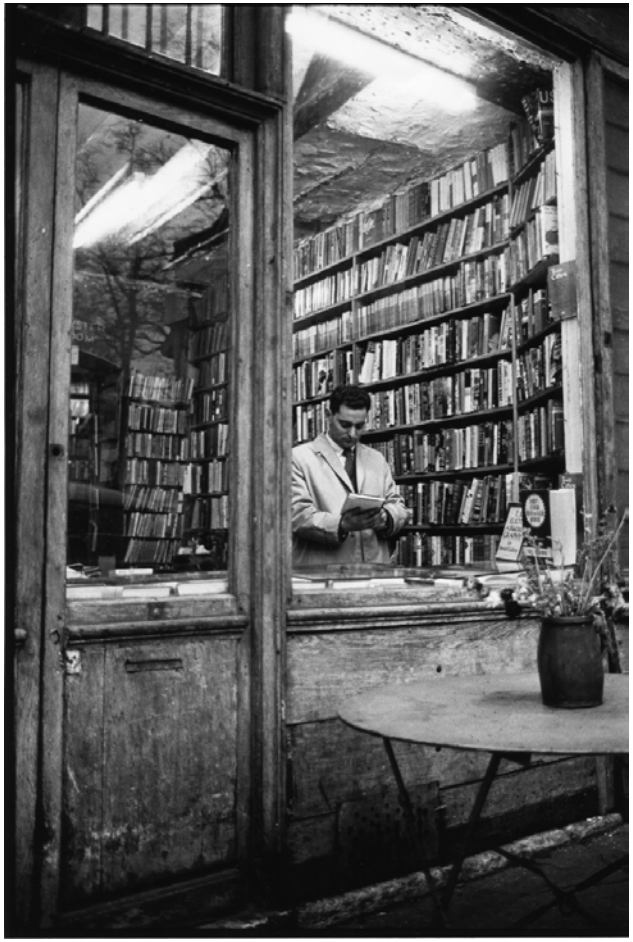
The Shakespeare idyll changed abruptly late in the afternoon on July 18th, 1990, when fire broke out across the hall from the writer's room, directly above the main floor of the bookshop, in the library. I was in my room, reading, when I smelled smoke. I ran across the hall to The Tumbleweed Hotel, George's name for the second-floor area above the bookstore where anyone could stay free of charge, but by this point the room was engulfed. I yelled for people to get out, then charged up the stairs to George's apartment to make sure no one was there and, after finding it empty, I exited the building with smoke billowing behind me. The *sapeurs pompiers* arrived minutes later, and over the course of the next hour extinguished the blaze. By this time hundreds had gathered. Many wailed, most of us stood still, in shock. George bit his lip, trembled slightly, and shrugged. Except for one firefighter, no one was injured.

That evening George quoted Joe Hill: "Don't mourn. Organize." And organize we did. By the morning over four thousand charred books were piled in front of the bookstore, on the sidewalk. Fortunately, the books in the room where I was staying were spared. The next morning, George opened as usual, despite the burned joists in the ceiling that left gaping holes between the first and second floors, no power, and the stench of charred wood and ash.

While George tended to business, friends continued to work. Karl presided over the desk and the ongoing chaotic clean up. By day three, another resident of the bookstore, English poet, and publisher, Richard Hallward, suggested to me that we needed to help George rebuild. We needed money.

Somehow, over a few glasses of wine at the next-door café, once much loved by Simone de Beauvoir and Georges Perec, we came up with the idea of doing benefit readings that fall to help rebuild the bookstore and library. I volunteered to coordinate the U.S. effort; Richard took on Europe. In October of that year, simultaneous readings took place in London, Paris, Boston, and New York. Richard worked hard to pull off readings in London and Paris; I didn't have it so hard. I phoned Allen Ginsberg in New York and Ferlinghetti in San Francisco. Allen organized New York. Lawrence said he wasn't going to be able to do anything at City Lights because the store was already booked that weekend but would ensure that George got

some financial help from San Franciscans. I did Boston.



Ginsberg had such a response from poets and writers who wanted to read that he had to schedule his readings over three days. By the end of the second day Allen called me to say that he'd raised about ten thousand dollars. And he had one more day to go! The Boston reading, at the ornate French Library in the Back Bay—featuring Frank Bidart, Lucie Brock Broido, Pam Alexander, Ed Barrett, Joe Lease, Patricia Pruitt, Bill Corbett, and Paul Auster—was also a success. Richard called from Paris that evening: they had read for 21 hours straight at the bookstore. The contributions were tremendous. Lawrence put on an exhibition at City Lights and received a fair amount of cash as well. All in all, 140 writers on two continents read work to about 5,000 people who contributed almost $30,000. Allen Ginsberg visited a few weeks after the fire, and photographed George and the ongoing renovations for posterity. Another frequent visitor at that time was Ray Bradbury, who had written about the horror of burned books in *Fahrenheit 451*.

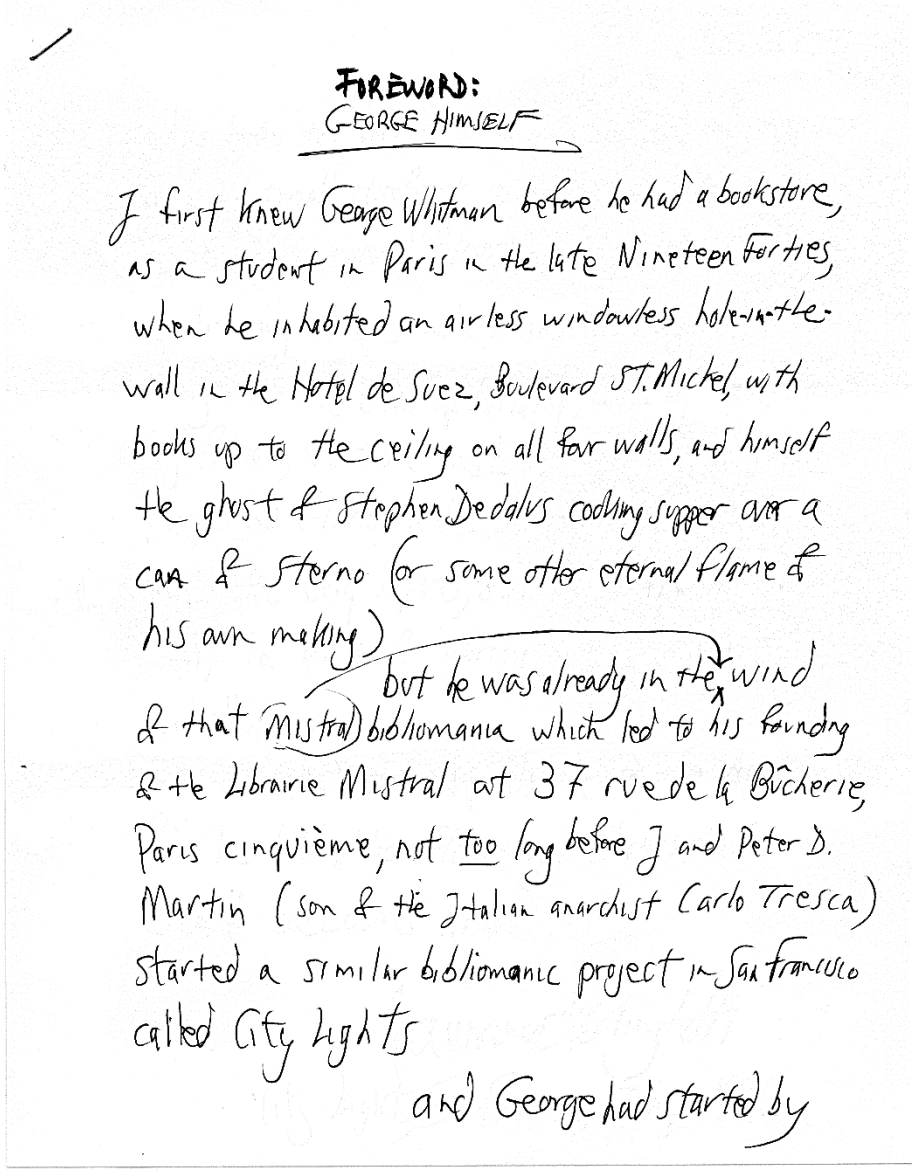
In November of 1991, Patricia and I returned to Paris. The bookstore was largely rebuilt, and the bookshelves again stocked. And although Patricia was booked to give a reading at another venue, she also agreed to give an additional impromptu reading at Shakespeare & Co. I kept in touch with George over the years, making sure any visit to Paris included lengthy visits to Shakespeare & Co. And we exchanged numerous letters in between in-person encounters.

But then, not long after the turn of the last century, I fell out of touch with George and his bookstore. Then I received word that the 96-year-old George Whitman had become an Officer in the Order of Arts and Letters, one of France's highest honors. While the award is generally reserved for French nationals, a few Americans have been honored. George's American company includes Allen Ginsberg, William Faulkner, Oscar Peterson, Jackson Pollock, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Toni Morrison. It is a fitting tribute to a man who has dedicated his life to arts, culture, and humanity. George no longer ran the bookstore daily: that had become the mission of his daughter Sylvia Beach Whitman, who was only 10 when the fire occurred.

I'd like to close by letting Lawrence Ferlinghetti offer the last word. After the Fire Readings of 1990, work read by many of the writers who participated in this benefit was collected in book form (*Fire Readings*, Paris: Frank Books, 1991). For

this volume, I asked Lawrence for an introduction. His words of 1991 pay homage now, as then, to a truly extraordinary individual.

But here's Lawrence, in his own hand:



FOREWORD:
GEORGE HIMSELF

I first knew George Whitman before he had a bookstore, as a student in Paris in the late Nineteen Forties, when he inhabited an airless windowless hole-in-the-wall in the Hotel de Suez, Boulevard St. Michel, with books up to the ceiling on all four walls, and himself the ghost of Stephen Dedalus cooking supper over a can of Sterno (or some other eternal flame of his own making)

but he was already in the wind of that Mistral bibliomania which led to his founding of the Librairie Mistral at 37 rue de la Bûcherie, Paris cinquième, not too long before I and Peter D. Martin (son of the Italian anarchist Carlo Tresca) started a similar bibliomanic project in San Francisco called City Lights

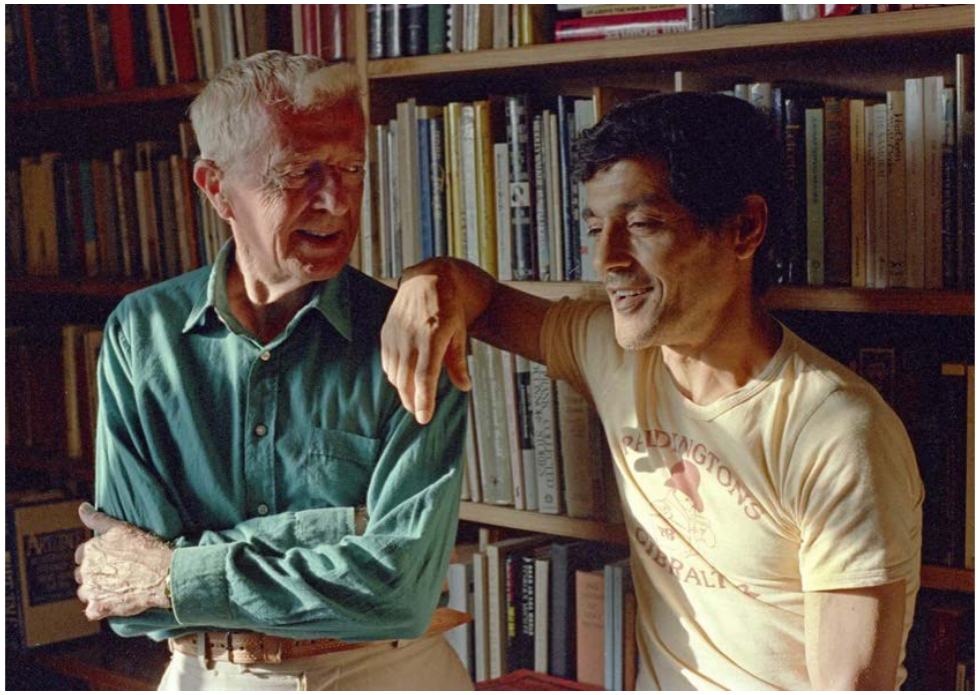
and George had started by

selling books to Americans on the G. I. Bill, and progressed from one small storefront groundfloor room to several chambers on several floors, up dilapidated stairways -- a literary octupus with an insatiable appetite for print taking over the beat-up building, room by room, floor by floor, veritable nests of books, and still some rooms and floors to be captured as late as 1991, much like City Lights, still growing from one small cell, "a kind of library where books are for sale"....

And ~~eternal~~ praise be to George for his bibliophilic flowering. Shakespeare's beard becomes him.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

City Lights, San Francisco, 11 May, 1991



Paul Bowles as I Knew Him

I first met Paul Bowles in the summer of 1985. We had corresponded some the year before, and he had invited me to come visit him in Tangier. At the time I knew that I wanted to write something about him, though I wasn't quite sure what. I had read everything he had published and was convinced that he was one of America's great writers. What I couldn't understand is why so few knew about him, why so few seemed to have read him, and why he had been so forgotten in his own country. My indignation had been further fueled that spring when, in response to a request to write a small study on an American writer for a university press, I had proposed Bowles and had been rejected. The editor essentially wrote back stating that Bowles was not important enough to warrant a publication.

I was enraged. Hadn't this editor read *The Sheltering Sky* or *Let it Come Down* or the *Spider's House*, among the best novels anyone had written in mid-century America? Didn't this editor know that Bowles was among America's greatest short story writers? Ever? I could understand that he might not know that Bowles also happened to be a gifted and

successful composer both of classical and incidental music for Broadway plays. I even could forgive him for not realizing that Bowles, who had lived in Morocco since 1949, had also rendered into English stunning works by the Moroccan writers Mohamed Choukri, Mohamed Mrabet and Layachi Larbi. But that he would dismiss Bowles so cavalierly, truly upset me. And so, of course, I set out for Tangier.

I arrived in Tangier that summer of 1985 with eyes and ears wide open. I realize now that I really had little idea of what to expect. Even though he had written me that he lived in an apartment across the street from the American consulate on the outskirts of Tangier proper, I had imagined the apartment to be some sort of Moroccan-style place, with tile and fountains, and that Bowles, like one of his characters, would maybe be dressed in a djellaba, lounging on cushions, smoking kif. I got the last parts right: he did still smoke kif and he did sit, though quite upright, on low cushions. His apartment in the Immeuble Itesa, a poured concrete edifice, however, was non-descript. The whole apartment was three and a half rooms, with the sala, with its three sets of cushions arranged triangularly surrounding a low table, the official visiting room.

Since I was sure that I was one of the few who knew who Bowles was, I expected that I'd have a private audience with the great man. To my surprise when I arrived the small apartment was full of guests. And Bowles, nattily clad in linen trousers and a well pressed light-blue shirt, was serving tea and conversing quite easily with the cortege who ringed him. Off to the side was a rather fierce-looking middle-aged Moroccan, who silently sat smoking kif. I introduced myself to Bowles, and he, in turn, introduced me to the others present. Then, motioning to the Moroccan, said simply: "And that's Mrabet." Mrabet scowled, returned to his kif. Mrabet. *The* Mrabet. The author of more than a half-dozen books, all translated by Bowles, that revealed Morocco and Moroccan society from the inside out. I was perhaps as thrilled to meet Mrabet as Bowles, but I could clearly see Mrabet had no interest in me or in anyone else who came to see Paul.

First impressions, of course, are not always accurate nor even true. In this case what I observed that first afternoon was a Bowles set piece, both true and untrue. At this time in his life—he was 74—he was far from the image I had in my mind of a reclusive, unknown writer holed up on the edge

of Tangier. He was, in fact, sought out by just about anyone with somewhat advanced literary interests who happened to pass through Tangier. And he welcomed those who flocked to the Immeuble Itesa. He enjoyed holding court, and while the conversations were not terribly deep, he didn't seem to mind giving pretty much the same answers to the same questions or telling stories about the way Tangier used to be and how now it was so dreadful.

What I quickly came to realize was that the dapper gentleman who held court in his sala on any given afternoon was a carefully constructed public persona. To paraphrase, albeit poorly, one of his great short stories, this "you" was not quite his "I." I spent years trying to penetrate beyond that set piece Paul so liked to offer the world. I spent years attempting to decipher who Bowles really was. And long after my biography was published, I continued to think about Bowles, puzzle out something he'd said. I'm not sure I ever really found out who he exactly was, but I did discover quite a lot about the man, and we, of course, had our own relationship. What I want to do today is give some sense of the Bowles that I knew, of the man and the artist, of the writer and composer.
Fortunately for me, I hung around Tangier long enough that first summer to penetrate somewhat beyond the Bowlesean surface. On probably a dozen occasions I did have the opportunity to talk with Paul alone. With his permission I recorded some of these conversations. And I found when I expressed my interest and knowledge of his work, he opened quite a bit. And talk about the work led to accounts of how the work came to be, and these often led to enchanting tales of a past life spent in exotic geographies. The other major entrée into Bowles's world came through Mrabet. On maybe the second or third visit to see Paul the only other person there was Mrabet. Since I spoke Spanish, the language that Paul and Mrabet spoke between them, I was able to enter their ongoing conversation. When others arrived, Mrabet invited me over to sit by him. I accepted, and we continued our conversation. From that moment on, Mrabet and I got on quite well.

By the time I returned to the States that fall, I had decided to write Bowles' biography. When I wrote Bowles what I wished to do, he was less than encouraging. "I hope no biography will be written during my lifetime." But he didn't shut the door either: "I hope you will come to Tangier and discuss the project with me." The following summer I returned and within a week or so Paul decided to

allow me to proceed, but with the caveat that he "be excused from all participation in the project."

Despite his official avowal not to participate, he never refused—at least outright—to answer a question, provide me with a contact, unearth a letter for me to read. Indeed, over the next couple of years, I spent a fair amount of time with him, talking and listening, reading, and rereading everything he had written, published or unpublished, talking with those who knew and had known him, playing, and listening to his music: in other words, immersing myself in his world and life.

Our relationship, of course, was odd. How could it not have been? I was prying into his life, unearthing memories, and experiences, some of which he wished would not come to light. He was nervous that I would expose him. And yet, he was clearly curious about what I was doing. I would like to say that we were good friends, but I cannot. We were not enemies either. After the biography was published, he wrote me that he supposed he "should be thankful [he] was not presented in a more unfavorable light; it certainly could have been done, and it was only your unwillingness to be harmful that prevented it."

I was glad that Paul realized that in doing my best to tell his story, my aim had never been to harm him. In fact, it was the opposite, and my admiration for him remains as strong now as it was decades ago.

I was probably closest to Paul during the winter of 1987. He was recuperating from surgery in which a doctor had severed his great sympathetic nerve as a way of treating a clogged artery. For several weeks in January, except for Mrabet, I was the only visitor. He was not strong, so I would only stay a couple of hours each day, but he seemed to look forward to my visits. For some reason, now not clear to me, I missed going to see him for a couple of days. When I showed up again, he was quite peeved. "I thought you'd suddenly decided to leave without even saying good-bye. I was about to send Mrabet looking for you." It was during this period that we spoke the most about people that were closest to his heart: his family, his wife Jane, his lover, and dear friend Ahmed Yacoubi. When I finally did have to leave, he said he hoped he'd see me again, but he supposed not. When I replied that I'd be back in June, he said that what he meant was that he wasn't sure he'd still be on the planet. "I hope you have all the information from me that you need," he added. Our parting was difficult.

I returned, as promised, in the summer of 1987. By that time, I'd become quite involved with his music and was as committed in reviving interest in his compositions as in his books. My desire for a concert finally materialized the following spring when Michel Redolfi, the Director of the Festival Manca in Nice, decided to dedicate a program to Bowles' music. I offered to come to Tangier to pick Paul up and take him to Nice, but he declined. I went in his place, but as a rank amateur had little to do with the actual production. The art songs were sung beautifully by Dale Duesing; the piano music, however, was performed quite poorly, mainly due to a lack of rehearsal time. And while I would have rather had better piano performances, the concert did, I believe, thanks in part to Radio France Culture's broadcast, help to remind the public, and musicians, that Paul was a composer whose works were worth performing.

Through all this period Paul and I exchanged letters, and I kept extensive journals of my conversations (when not taped) with him. I also wrote a fair number of reflections on him, his work, and on others I got to know at the time. In putting together this text I reread our letters, reread my journals. In reviewing this material from more than 30 years ago, I was somewhat surprised at how vivid those memories were. And how many memories there were! Which ones were worth sharing? How to form a portrait of this extraordinary man? In the end I decided to focus on three aspects of Bowles that I think say the most about who he was: his relationship to Morocco and Moroccans, his friendships, and views on friendship; and finally, his own sense of himself as a creative artist.

Perhaps because Mrabet helped open the door for me to Bowles—indeed he often managed to draw Paul out on subjects no one else could—I think it useful to begin there. Paul's relationship with Mrabet, I came to see over the years, was to some extent emblematic of his relationship with Morocco, itself. One on one Bowles was the interested party, drawing him out, encouraging his kif-inspired ramblings, delighting in the darker and sinister tales, becoming inspired himself by his vivid accounts and commentaries.

Mrabet functioned in many ways as Bowles's eyes and ears on Morocco; he brought him stories (and kif), kept him informed of the gossip on the street, and of the latest happenings. He also watched out for Paul. In later years he made him both breakfast and dinner. Mrabet was attentive and caring and

very useful to Paul. But, of course, Paul was exceedingly helpful to Mrabet. Without his recognition of Mrabet's genius, and his willingness to record and translate his stories and novels, he would likely have remained just another kif-smoking, Moroccan fisherman.

What Mrabet represented for Bowles was a Morocco of the past, where people still told stories to one another, where life was lived more simply, where art was inspired by the world around the artist not by a European gallery, where music was played on instruments, not boom boxes. Bowles has been accused by some critics as being a neo-colonialist, or even a colonialist. These charges have some merit. Bowles certainly did have a somewhat paternalistic attitude toward Moroccans, and by the mid-80s was certain that Morocco was—to use his term—"ruined." Even as early as the mid-50s, however, he was feeling that an era was quickly coming to an end. In *The Spider's House,* Stenham, whom Bowles acknowledged shared similar viewpoints to his own, says: "When I first came here it was a pure country. There was music and dancing and magic every day in the streets. Now it's finished, everything. Even the religion. In a few more years the whole country will be like all the other Moslem countries, just a huge European slum, full of poverty and hatred." When I asked him about this quote, he looked at me with a wry smile on his face. "Well? Stenham was right, wasn't he? Oh, maybe not. It's even worse than he thought it would be thirty years ago."

Remarks of this sort were common coming from Paul. Mrabet largely shared Bowles' feelings that so-called progress had erased so much of traditional Morocco. Bowles, in fact, told me that both he and Mrabet had been vilified in the press.

> I've been attacked at various times in the paper for being a neo-colonialist. First, they claim that I wrote all the translations that I do and that the Moroccan writers don't exist. Mrabet doesn't exist. And of course, he got angry about that. And then they said that yes, Mrabet exists, but he's just a *pantin*, a marionette being manipulated by the Americans, and implying practically that the CIA was behind it. Idiotic. They didn't really like what he does because for them it's a Morocco of the past. They don't want to admit that there's any magic today. There is, and they know it, but officially there's no such thing. And there's no kif so you can't write about that. Mrabet just writes about

> what he imagines and sees without any political overtones whatever. But for them it's very reactionary, practically wicked.

Mohamed Choukri, whose novel *For Bread Alone* Bowles translated, as well as other books, did not share Mrabet's view or sensibility. Choukri told me that Paul was only interested in a Morocco that no longer existed; a Morocco in which Europeans had privileges, where the natives were backward and in awe of the Westerner. "He hates everything about Tangier, today. He hates it that we're an independent country, that we liberated ourselves from the French. And he hates everybody in Tangier except for his old friends up on the Old Mountain and a few Moroccans who get favors from him by telling him what he wants to hear."

Choukri, who by the time I met him was no longer friendly with Paul, certainly had some axes to grind, but he wasn't entirely off-base either. Nonetheless, it was not nearly as simple as Choukri stated it. The problem Bowles had with Morocco after independence was not that the country was no longer under the control of a foreign power. What bothered him was that Morocco and its people seemed to have lost their own identities. Or as he told me:

"Most Moroccans you'll meet these days want to deny their own past, or don't even know of their past. They don't want to be reminded that they once had a flourishing culture and long traditions. And what do they have now? Everything they can import: music, televisions, blue jeans, cars, appliances, even food. They're less independent now than they were before independence. But they think they're living the good 20th century life."

So-called progress erased tradition. Bowles's story "The Hyena," in which a hyena lures a stork into his cave with promises of peace and friendship and then kills him, served for him as the fable that summed it all up. Or as he told me: "The stork represents tradition; the hyena represents progress. Progress normally wins out. Tradition isn't strong enough."

So, what to make of all of this? My journals are full of contradictory assessments. In one entry, for instance, occasioned by listening with Paul to some of his recordings of Moroccan music, I chronicle how clearly dedicated Bowles was to preserving this exceptional music, to what lengths he went to make these recordings, how much he cared about them, how important it is that he did this. In another entry, just a few days later, I react to his

pronouncements that Tangier has nothing to offer him any longer, so why should he bother to engage it. And I noted on so many occasions how dismissive Bowles was of anything contemporary in Moroccan culture, how he isolated himself from the outside world, how except for Mrabet, all his visitors seemed to be Westerners, mostly from abroad. Clearly Bowles had decided that there was no reason any longer to venture beyond his own apartment.

Indeed, by the time I knew him his excursions outside the house were exceedingly limited. At about 4:30 each day his faithful driver Abdelhouaid would come to drive Bowles in his 1966 gold Mustang to the post office. Occasionally, Paul would go to dinner at a friend's house on the Old Mountain. And the American School and the consulate would occasionally invite him to some event. But he rarely sat in a café any longer, or picked out his fruit at Tangier's Fez Market, or even walked along Merkala Beach. He claimed that nothing in Tangier interested him any longer. "So why stay?" I asked him one day. "I'm as comfortable here as I would be any place else. Besides, where would I go?"

In the end I've come to feel that Bowles was not really a neo-colonialist, but rather a victim of nostalgia for an earlier period. In what he though was a more Moroccan Morocco of the 30s and 40s and early 50s he had found inspiration for his best work. He actively sought experience, and experience seemed to have sought him, as well. Little escaped his notice because he was so alert to all that was happening around him. But because he convinced himself that tradition was vanishing with progress, that Morocco was rapidly changing for the worse, he began to lose interest in what was happening. And as he grew older, he became more and more content to isolate himself from the outside. If the world came to him, that was fine. But he would not go to the world.

And the world that came was largely the Western world, the place where he was best known. "I have no reputation in Morocco at all," he told me. "Moroccan writers don't know that I exist, or if they do, they don't care. The best ones don't live here anyway; they're all in France or somewhere abroad." And so, what appears to be a neo-colonialist attitude is more that of a willful separation of the Morocco that *is* from the Morocco that *was*. The Morocco that is, was devoid of interest; the Morocco that was, was the land that gave life to his writing. The hyena and the stork.

From the time Bowles first went to Morocco, he, of course, lived and navigated two worlds: that of expatriate Tangier, and that of Moroccan Tangier. From what he and others told me, there was far less of a divide during the 40s, 50s and even 60s than there was by the 70s and 80s, and yet there was still a division. Bowles' closest friends were mainly members of the expatriate set, but even there a schism existed between the Old Mountain crowd—folks such as Lord David Herbert, Marguerite McBay, Rex Henry, and Jay Hazelwood—and less pedigreed (or at least poorer) expats such as Brion Gysin, William Burroughs, and Alfred Chester. As Burroughs remembered it, "[Paul] was in solidly with The Old Mountain crowd, that rather wealthy expatriate circle. Paul was a celebrity in that group and regarded as a celebrity." Along with these two groups were those who came to visit for an extended time, such as: Tennessee Williams, Cecil Beaton, Gore Vidal, Truman Capote, Maurice Grosser, Ned Rorem, Buffie Johnson, and then the Beats: Kerouac, Ginsberg, Ted Joans, and Corso.

The painter Buffie Johnson, who had known Paul and Jane since the 30s in New York, and who lived off and on in Jane's apartment after her death, noted that Paul was at ease, as she put it, "in high or low society." According to Buffie, "He could lunch with David Herbert at noon, have dinner with Yacoubi, meet up with Tennessee later that night, and the next morning visit with Burroughs in the hole he lived in at the Muniriya. And what was remarkable is that he was always the same person: unfailingly courteous, interested in what his friends had to say, always offering something of himself."

My own observations of Bowles's interaction with all and sundry match that of Buffie. And Bowles was a loyal friend. He counted Virgil Thomson, for instance, whom he hadn't seen face to face in more than a quarter century as a dear and close friend. Correspondence kept them in touch. Virgil and Paul were still writing each other in the 80s. It was no coincidence that among the last pieces of fiction Paul wrote were two epistolary stories, "Unwelcome Words" and "In Absentia." The way he kept in touch with many was through the post. He eagerly looked forward to each day's batch of letters, and routinely devoted himself each day to responding to his many correspondents.

Paul kept his associations with so many alive for him and for others through reminiscences. Paul loved to tell stories about his many friends over many years. One of my greatest pleasures was to listen to Paul mimic the accents and speaking styles

of folks like Tennessee Williams, Capote, John Latouche, and Burroughs. When Bowles talked of them, they almost became present. Dialogue was a natural feature of these tales, the speakers' voices alternating in pitch, tone, and accent. If song was required, then it was sung. Friendships, he once told me, kept him going during the long years of Jane's decline. By the 80s, many of those he'd been closest with, such as Williams, Capote, and Libby Holman were dead. And others, such as Burroughs, Édouard Roditi, Thomson or Rorem no longer came to Tangier.

Reminiscing about old friends was a chief topic of conversation when Bowles did get together with those whom he'd known for years. I was present on several occasions when he and Buffie would begin conversing about someone from their past. Paul, whose memory was nearly photographic, could recall the tiniest details about past events, including conversations. And while Paul could certainly be rather catty at times, and enjoyed gossip and gossiping, I rarely heard him say anything nasty about anyone.

He was even generous toward the writer Alfred Chester, with whom he'd had enormous difficulties. While he did describe Chester as "that horror," he also allowed how the poor man couldn't really help himself. "He was totally mad." Once, I was the third party when Marguerite McBey came to visit. At some point the conversation turned to them remembering various deceased members of the Old Mountain crowd. And again, Bowles would mimic the accents—this time British—of certain individuals, and suddenly one recollection would turn to another and Tangier, as it was in the 1950s, was suddenly spread out before my eyes.

Memories, in fact, were very much in the forefront of Bowles's mind by the time I got to know him. It wasn't that he lived in the past but as he told me: "Those were better times."

And then, of course, there were his Moroccan friends. From what I observed, Moroccans were rarely present in the same room at the same time as Westerners. Bowles told me that was because there were still rigid class divisions in Tangier. Neither side, he told me, felt comfortable mingling in large social situations. Even when Moroccans invited you to their houses, they would generally not invite many other Moroccans.

Édouard Roditi told me that this was something of an issue for him when he was in Morocco, because

neither Europeans nor Moroccans were accustomed to joining together in a group. "You rarely attended a dinner party, for instance, in which you'd have Moroccans seated with Europeans or Americans. It just didn't happen. When you left, you might return to your place where your Arab boy would be waiting but few would ever think of bringing the Arab boy with them to dinner. And the Arab boy wouldn't expect to be invited."

I observed this often. Even when both Mrabet and Bowles' driver and handyman, Abdelhouaid were present, they rarely joined or were asked to join a group of Westerners. If it were just the four of us, then a conversation was possible, but the moment others arrived, the Moroccans retreated to the other room, or left the house all together.

When I asked Mrabet about it, he told me that he had no interest in meeting most of those who came to see Bowles: "Even if they speak Spanish or French, they don't usually have anything to tell me that I want to hear, and they could care less what I have to say." When asked about the divide, in general, Mrabet told me that the foreigners almost all saw the Moroccans as either servants or sex partners, and that many Moroccans could only see the foreigners as rich people who would give them jobs and money and gifts, or at least money for sex. Or as he explained: "Some of the foreigners were very nice to us, gave us presents and money and asked for little in exchange; others were not that way. They'd cheat us out of money they owed us, accuse us of stealing, find ways to get rid of us. Paul and Jane were always good. Jane was too good and let Cherifa take over her life. Even after Cherifa tried to kill Jane, she wouldn't stop her from coming to see her. And when she came it was only to work her bad magic and get Jane or Paul to give her more money. Paul was generous to everyone, even Cherifa. Yacoubi was first for sex but soon became like a son to Paul. Larbi and Choukri he also helped but they turned on him. I'm not Paul's son. I'm his friend. He never asked me for sex. And Paul's my friend."

I would be remiss in talking about Paul's friends if I didn't mention that among his closest and dearest friends were the characters in his books. To hear Paul talk about his fictional characters, they were as alive as anyone he'd ever known. Here, for instance, is Bowles talking about two of his characters in *Up Above the World*: "His real name was Grover; he was called Grovero as a joke. And from Grovero it became Vero…I liked Luchita with her terrible drawings. She was a real hippie, I think. She

prefigured Haight-Ashbury. They also drew pictures on the sidewalk with colored crayon and colored chalk. What did she say? She said she earned 8000 old francs a day doing it in St. Germaine-des-pres. I think they could do it here, too. The only thing is you better not try." And in talking about Dyar, in *Let it Come Down*, Bowles told me: "He wasn't terribly bright. He expects to be a victim and then he is a victim: he's his own victim."

It's not unusual, of course, for writers to speak about their characters as living, breathing, beings but Bowles told me that for him it wasn't worth writing about someone unless he knew exactly who he or she was. "I had to know what their story was, where they'd come from, who they'd been before I met them. Once I knew this, then I could go on with them."

Kif often helped Bowles go on with his characters. Paul told me that he struggled and struggled with Port's death scene until one day he scored some majoun and climbed up a hillside overlooking the port where he consumed it. The effect was tremendous, with Bowles hallucinating, the harbor and trees taking on grotesque forms, the very ground he was walking on in an attempt to get back to his cottage, shifting under him. In his state of intoxication, he was unable to write, but after the effects began to wear off, he made some notes and by the next day was able to write almost the entire scene. Bowles, in fact, was a great believer in allowing the subconscious to inform the conscious self. He told me that several stories would never have been written without what he termed "oracular consultation delivered through a kif pilgrimage to the other world."

While to be sure kif was extremely helpful to Bowles in that it allowed him to relinquish conscious control over his subject, and therefore permit other possibilities to enter, it would also not be accurate to say that Paul didn't also plan many of his stories, and to some degree all the novels. Even *The Sheltering Sky*, the novel he least structured in advance, was framed in general long before he even actively began to write it. *Let it Come Down*, he told me, because of what he called "the impossible ending" was planned down to the smallest detail. And yet to enter the minds of his characters, he allowed kif to be his guide.

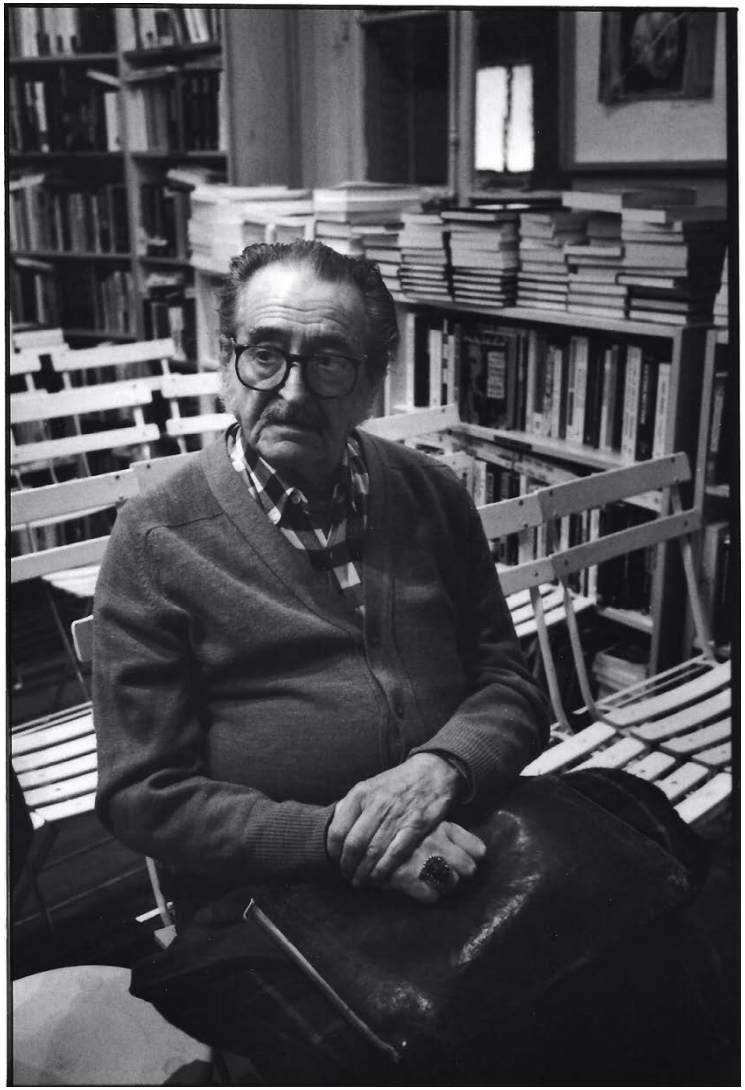
Writing music was, according to Paul, a very different process from writing fiction. Incidental music that he wrote for theater productions was always keyed to a programmed set of actions on

stage. And while he was free to interpret how the action might sound, he also felt, as put it, "quite circumscribed."

He did feel freer when he wrote non-theatre work, but even then, he claimed he could never simply allow one note to lead to another note until a work was completed. "I had to see the whole structure," he told me. He also noted that while music had to be written quite precisely, he often found he could not express precisely what he wanted to do through notes alone. Only through words could he sometimes say what he thought he had to say. Finally, he claimed that writing was more cathartic than composing. In writing, he could follow the contours of the subconscious as they manifested themselves in his consciousness. Bowles did say that he thoroughly enjoyed listening to or performing music in a kif-induced state, but he said he wrote little while under the influence. "It doesn't work the same way," he simply said. "I don't really know why."

"I don't really know why." Paul said that to me about so many things on so many occasions. Occasionally, it was a way of deflecting me from probing further. But more often I feel it was an honest response. He really didn't know why he had done this or that, why a story emerged, why he made so many of the decisions he made. It was part of his openness, even part of his charm.

It's been more than 25 years since I first set foot in Paul's sala. He is as vivid to me today as he was all those years ago. He is as important to me today as he was then. His legacy is his work, both writing and music. I'm delighted to celebrate that considerable legacy.



Édouard Roditi

During my early days in Paris in the mid-1970s, I frequented *vernissages* at several fashionable art galleries. I was certainly interested in the art and artists, but I was also lured by the free wine and food. In probably June or July of 1975 I attended an opening of a Roberto Matta show at the Galerie Alexandre Iolas on the Boulevard Saint-Germain, just around the corner from my studio apartment on rue Jacob. The show was magnificent, with probably a dozen large paintings on display. Matta was there, nattily dressed, with a neatly knotted blue bandana, voluminous trousers, and an oversized white shirt. I made my way through the crowd and waited my turn to speak to the artist.

Aside from thanking Matta for painting such marvelous canvasses, I don't recall much else of our brief conversation. Standing next to him was an older, tall, elegant gentleman with a thin mustache and slicked back black hair. He sported a white jacket, blue checked shirt, and, I believe, a black tie. A woman, obviously a friend of the painter, suddenly burst through the crowd. They embraced.

I attempted to make an exit but was stopped by the elegant gentleman who inquired as to what my interest was in Matta.

I said something like :

“L'art moderne m'intéresse, en particulier le surréalisme. Je suis actuellement en train d'écrire une thèse sur les collaborations entre poètes et peintres en France.”

He replied :

“Quel excellent sujet. Et vous êtes Espagnol ?”

“Non,” I laughed, “Américain.” The gentleman had already picked up my slight Spanish accent in French. It usually took the French a little longer.

“My name is Édouard Roditi,” he said in Oxford English. “Would you care to join me for an aperitif at Café de Flore? I was just heading over there. I know something about art and Surrealism and poetry and I’m very intrigued by your dissertation topic.”

We sat at the Flore, a café I couldn’t normally afford, and over a couple of over-priced Ricards, talked for probably an hour or so. Unlike me, Édouard had a real purpose in being at the Matta show: he was writing up the exhibition for a Paris art magazine. Indeed, I later learned, among Édouard’s many talents, he was also a distinguished art critic.

I was totally intrigued by this brilliant cosmopolitan raconteur who not only knew about Surrealism but knew, or had known, nearly all of them personally: Breton, Aragon, Ernst, Eluard, Desnos, Crevel and on and on. He had even translated Breton’s *Jeunes Cerisiers Garantis Contre les Lièvres* (*Young Cherry Trees Secured Against Hares*) and had worked with Breton at the Voice of America during World War II, when they were both exiles in New York.

I would likely have sat at the Flore for much longer, but Édouard said he had another engagement for which he was already a bit late. He then said he so hoped he might see me later that night, then added, “My bed is large and comfortable.” I was not put off by his rather frank invitation but did have to tell him that I could not accept. “Quel dommage,” he replied, as he disappeared down the boulevard.

It wasn’t until the next morning that I realized we had not exchanged addresses. I did keep an eye out

for him for a while but not long after I moved across town to the rue de Rome and did not frequent my old *quartier* nearly as much.

A decade or so later, Mark Polizzotti, who was editing my biography of Paul Bowles, and who was himself beginning a biography of André Breton, informed me that I needed to meet Édouard Roditi, who had known Bowles for fifty years. He had just spent an afternoon with Roditi who had taken a visiting professorship at Columbia and found him an extraordinary source. I suddenly flashed back to Paris. "Yes," I said, "Please give me his phone number." Three days later, Édouard and I resumed our conversation from ten years before, this time in his apartment near Columbia.

I wasn't sure that Édouard would remember our brief meeting in Paris so long ago but within a few minutes after I'd knocked on his door, he said he regretted he hadn't had the opportunity to buy me another Ricard. I said I regretted not having gotten his coordinates so we could have continued our conversation. "Well, we can now," he said. And what conversations we had!

Initially, of course, I grilled him about Bowles. He was enormously forthcoming, providing not only incisive details about his youthful exchanges by post with Paul, their first meetings in Paris, and their continued friendship over years and years, but also extraordinary insights into who Paul and Jane were as individuals. He also gave me several chapters from a memoir he was then writing about his friendships with remarkable writers and artists, including his chapter on Bowles. Both his oral and written commentaries were illuminating, not to mention, delightful, and *An Invisible Spectator* is a better and more complete biography because of Édouard's invaluable contributions.

The time I spent with him that day turned out to be far more than just an information-gathering expedition. We became friends. I felt blessed then and feel blessed now for that friendship. Over the next couple of years, we saw each other frequently. Between visits, we corresponded. I learned about his life, about his epilepsy, about his ongoing projects. We could seemingly talk for hours without the time even seem to whisk by us. I loved Édouard's stories about meeting Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust, and Gertrude Stein, and about his friendships with T.S. Eliot, Alain Bosquet, Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender, Hannah Höch, Kenneth Rexroth, Paul Goodman, Ned Rorem, Breton, Crevel and scores of others.

He was enormously encouraging about my own work. When my translation of Lorca's "legends" and short plays came out from City Lights, he approved my Englishing of Lorca's Spanish. And of course, he had even met Lorca on the Spanish poet's brief stay in Paris before he set sail for New York. And slept with him.

The more time I spent with Édouard, the more in awe I became. Our conversations never seemed frivolous. Indeed, some were exceedingly dark, particularly when he talked about his time as an interpreter at the Nuremberg Trials. Interpreting the words of Nazis was excruciating, he once told me. When I replied that I could certainly understand, he rather curtly informed me that I couldn't. "What made it most difficult was the way Hitler's henchman could speak so dispassionately about the atrocities, the torture, the executions. They portrayed themselves as simply technocrats who were attempting to carry out Hitler's or Himmler's or Eichmann's orders in the most efficient manner. They had no remorse, no humanity. That constituted an even greater horror."

In another conversation I remember him telling me that until late in the War, The Voice of America prohibited broadcasting that the Reich were deporting Jews to concentration camps, or as he called them, "extermination camps." "It was pretty evident to me and many others that the United States had not entered the war to save Jews or even Europeans. It was about Pearl Harbor. And Pearl Harbor only."
Despite Roditi's revulsion of "The Horror. The Horror," he stayed on in Berlin working for the State Department after the conclusion of the Trials. He would have remained far longer, he told me, but in 1952 he was fired, since as a Gay man he was regarded as a security risk. Nonetheless, the time he did spend there was fruitful. Never one to confine himself to only one pursuit, he often talked fondly about founding and editing with Alexander Koval and Alain Bosquet *Das Lot*, which became a highly respected literary journal in Germany from 1947-52, particularly for its translations of American writers such as Langston Hughes, Paul Bowles, Scott Fitzgerald, Henry Miller, Kenneth Rexroth, Parker Tyler, and Paul Goodman.

By 1990 or so, Édouard was teaching at Bard College. I mentioned to Roditi that I was going to be visiting John Ashbery one weekend, and so would stop by nearby Annandale and see him. "I haven't seen John since Paris," he said. "Could I get an invitation?" When I asked John, he was effusive

in extending an invite. At some point in the late afternoon, I fetched Édouard from his apartment near Bard, and we descended on John and his partner David Kermani. I have no recollection of what John and David made for dinner, but I do recall John's martinis. But most of all I remember Édouard and John regaling us with gossip and droll stories of Paris until late that evening, so late, that Édouard ended up staying the night.

During the summer of 1990 I was back in Paris, as was Édouard. We met up on several occasions, often at his apartment filled with paintings, many by Turkish artists (whom I would later learn were members of a Euro-Turkish art movement called the "D Group"). Among the impressive canvasses hanging cheek-by-jowl on Roditi's walls were works by some of the more celebrated artists in that group including Arsalan Naqvi, Bedri Rahmi, Fahewlnissa Zeyd, Aliye Berger and Abidin Dino. Édouard had gotten to know them either in France or in Istanbul where he lived in the early 1960s. As always, being with Édouard was an education.

My education was furthered even more at some time in 1991 when Roditi sent me a 500-page draft of his memoir of remarkable writers and artists he had known over more than a half century. The writing was—no surprise—elaborate but clear, the remembrances compelling. I called my agent Roslyn Targ and strongly suggested that she should represent Édouard. I sent her my copy. She got in touch with Roditi; they lunched; they reminisced, and she agreed to represent him. She did ask him to cut redundancies and trim the text. He had no issue with doing so but told Ros it would take him a while, as he wanted to do it right.

I don't remember seeing Édouard again until the fall of 1991, again in Paris. I believe I had just returned from Zurich, which inspired Édouard to recount meeting James Joyce whom he described as "drunk, overbearing and a bore." I remember saying that surprised me. "Don't confuse the writer with his work," Roditi replied. I countered with accolades for *Finnegans Wake*, about which I was then writing. Part of my work, an essay on Joyce and Rabelais, became *The World's Words*, the first book ever published by Alyscamps Press.

My companion did not argue with my assessment of *Finnegans Wake* but used my remark to turn the conversation to Paul Celan and what he did with language. He said something to the effect that both Joyce and Celan reinvented language, but in very different ways. For Joyce, English was a source of

amusement, where idioms could be toyed with just for the sake of toying with them; for Celan, German needed to be reclaimed, to be purged of the Nazi cast that had perverted it into a language of terror and destruction and misery. “But his Romanian poems,” said Roditi. “Those are something else altogether. Surrealism, Romanian style.” By the time I left the cafe, we had agreed to translate Celan's Romanian poems.

Édouard, a true polyglot, of course knew Romanian. I had some knowledge of the language but read it mostly through French, Latin and the other Romance languages that I knew much better. Not long after our meeting, I went back to the United States. Through letters we worked out how we would translate the poems: we would each draft a translation, then compare and combine and edit. We didn't initially have a lot of poems to work with, as Celan had never published these poems in book form. But Celan's widow Giselle, whom Édouard had known since she first married Celan, promised to give us more of these early poems.

We only managed to do a few before Édouard died while visiting a friend in Cadiz in May of 1992. “Lovesong” sat in my filing cabinet for 30 years. In 2020, Alyscamps Press issued two separate essays Roditi had written as part of his memoir, including one on Celan. This prompted me to send “Lovesong” to Karl Orend at Alyscamps. He issued the poem as a 2021 New Year’s gift to friends of the press. Here's our translation.

Lovesong

When at daybreak the nights for you commence
our phosphorous eyeballs will clamber down the walls,
strewing walnuts,
You will toss them aloft and an ocean wave will come
coursing in through the window.
Through the translucent floor — our singular shipwreck—
we will gaze into the empty room below;
With your walnuts you will furnish it,
and for curtains for the windows I will hang your flowing hair,
Someone will arrive, and finally, it will be rented.
Upstairs, we’ll return, to drown alone at home.

Unfortunately, it was not just translations of Celan’s Romanian poems that were left unfinished. Édouard did not have time to complete the editing of his memoir either and, without substantive

revisions, Ros was unable to interest a publisher. I do have hope that one day it will be published.

Édouard lived fully, loved fully, took everything an everyone in. I miss him dearly.

Remembering Seamus Heaney

One of the greatest poets we've ever known died Friday morning, August 30, 2013, in Dublin, at the age of 74. The news arrived just after breakfast, in the form of an email from a mutual friend. I was shocked and saddened and angry. I knew, since his stroke in August 2006, that he'd been plagued by ill health. But somehow, I expected he'd go on and on. After all, he certainly lived within me. I carried inside of me his poems, his broad face, his smile, his generosity, his intense warmth, his mischievous eyes, his deep laugh, his effusive gestures, and the way, when he spoke, that open vowels glided and bounced for a moment before bursting into words. Which is to say, I suppose that he's not dead for me. Nor does his physical passing mean that he's not still deeply alive for those who care about poetry, who know, as Seamus knew so well, that poetry somehow helps to keep us alive and vital and in touch with our fellow beings.

Memories flood in: Seamus reading poems and talking to our daughter's ninth-grade class about poetry and why it matters and how it matters.

Seamus, elegantly dressed in a black tuxedo, raising his wine glass, then somehow missing his mouth, and pouring red wine down the front of his ruffled pinkish shirt. "Oh well, I hate this shirt, anyway. And the wine has produced on this rather ridiculous garment a rather distinctive pattern, has it not? Chris, pour me another one, and let's try it again."

And then there was Seamus counseling a student on her poems, giving her the same advice that he'd heard from his teacher, advice he memorialized in his poem "Fosterage":

…'Listen. Go your own way.
Do your own work…'
But to hell with overstating it:
'Don't have the veins bulging in your biro.'

We'd meet up occasionally at a bar in Harvard Square that no longer exists, a very ordinary place called "One Potato, Two Potato." He hadn't yet won the Nobel--that would happen within a few years—but he was already famous and had taken Robert Fitzgerald's place at Harvard as the Boylston Professor of Poetry. He could have raised a glass anywhere, but he liked "One Potato." It was quiet, small, and decidedly unpretentious. He was neither small nor quiet, but he was certainly unpretentious. He delighted as much in conversation with a carpenter bellying up to the bar as he did to converse with the *hoi polloi.*

He loved to tell stories about Northern Ireland and its characters, about growing up, poor, on a potato farm. Stories not so different from the ones he told us about in his poems:

…The cold smell of potato mold, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

As Auden said of Yeats: *"Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry."*

Seamus rarely recited his own verse, but he loved to intersperse poems by others into his often-circuitous commentary on just about anything or anyone: Hardy, Yeats, Ted Hughes, Robert Lowell, Wordsworth, Hopkins, Roethke, Elizabeth Bishop, Edward Thomas, Larkin, Hugh MacDiarmid, and

Patrick Kavanagh were, in my memory, the poets he most quoted.

The last time my wife Patricia Pruitt and I saw Seamus was in Portugal, in May 2004. Patricia and I were invited readers at an international poetry festival in Coimbra. Seamus was the guest of honor. It was a rather extraordinary event with poets from all over the world gathering for a week to read and talk and party. Seamus was scheduled to read one evening outside of Coimbra in the tiny village of Conimbriga, notable mainly for its Roman ruins. We were bussed in and arrived just as the sun had set. The village itself consisted of only a few streets. There was one café in the center, with a few tables and garish neon lights.

Seamus, Patricia, and I descended on the place. Since Seamus didn't speak any Portuguese, he asked me to ask the bartender for a bottle of Jameson's. I told him I'd ask but didn't think we'd have much success. "What's the back-up?" I asked. "Jameson's," he said. Miraculously, the bartender produced a dusty bottle from under the counter. Over the next half hour, Seamus regaled us with stories as he and I drank Jameson's (Patricia, I believe, had wine).

We then trotted down the hill to hear Seamus read. It was a magical night. The ruins were lit with flickering lamps; above, a canopy of stars stretched across the sky. And then Seamus began to read "The Tollund Man in Springtime"**:**

"The soul exceeds its circumstances". Yes.
History not to be granted the last word
Or the first claim … In the end I gathered
From the display-case peat my staying powers,
Told my webbed wrists to be like silver birches,
My old uncalloused hands to be young sward,
The spade-cut skin to heal, and got restored
By telling myself this.

John Ashbery

It was an unseasonably mild winter day in early 1990 when I arrived at John Ashbery's apartment in Chelsea, New York. We had arranged the day before to have lunch together. To my surprise, when John opened the door, he was still in pajamas and maroon bathrobe. He registered my expression.

"Come in, come in. I haven't forgotten our date," he said wryly.

Unlike his main residence in Hudson, NY, that was opulently furnished in high Victorian décor, his blue and white New York City apartment was considerably more Spartan. A large living room gave onto the kitchen/dining area. A long modernist couch was piled with books at either end as was a long coffee table situated in front of the sofa. The wall-length bookcase on the other side of the room was crammed with books.

"I'm sorry I'm not ready yet," he said. "I've been working and lost my sense of time. I think I just finished a poem."

He motioned to the dining table where a thick manuscript, edges crisp, sat next to an empty coffee cup and a black Underwood typewriter.

"Give me a few minutes to get ready and then we'll go eat."

He disappeared into the bathroom. I sat on the couch restraining myself with enormous difficulty from spying on the manuscript. A few minutes later John emerged, as dapper as ever. I didn't ask him about the "poem" he'd just finished.

I first got to know John well when I was writing my book *The Continual Pilgrimage: American Writers in Paris 1944-1960*. Ashbery, along with his friend, novelist Harry Mathews, was the subject of one of the chapters. John had been enormously open about his life and work while I poked and prodded him for details about his time in Paris from 1955-1966. Unfailingly generous, he was continually offering anecdote and background and a fair number of stories about others. By the time we were meeting up for lunch in New York, the interviews were long over. We had by this point become friends.

During the academic year 1989-90 that John spent at Harvard, where he delivered the Norton Lectures, my wife Patricia Pruitt, our mutual friend Ed Barrett, and I spent a fair amount of time in his company, hosting him, visiting him at his home in Hudson, wandering through galleries and museums, and just sitting and talking, often with a drink in hand. John liked his alcohol. We often went out to dinner together. One memorable evening Patricia, Ed Barret and I went with John to a restaurant in Cambridge. John still needed to revise his lecture for the next day. After an hour, and four bottles of Spanish Olarra wine, the duck he ordered had not yet arrived, and he was becoming increasingly nervous about having enough time to polish his talk. Patricia's poem "Spring Duck" vividly evokes that evening:

Spring Duck

For John Ashbery

Blame it on a metal-roller micro pen,
on your tournesol sestina en double—indubitablement
you suffer fools with grace and lights going out
often and too soon

The ice cream is too frozen to serve, we must wait
for Spring again despite all we know
who've been around the block a time or two.

"Be back in apple blossom time," you say.

Olarra Ohara Ojalá

All's unknown and in a yellow
restaurant you exclaim,
"Where the fuck's my duck!"
and later a hedge of sunflowers
grows up in the old rose garden.

John was witty and earnest, tender and gracious. Few minds were as quick as his. His depth and breadth on a score of subjects ranging from music and literature to comic books and cartoons, from art to early cinema was prodigious.

He was as easy in person as he was difficult in poetry. Ashbery's poetry, of course, is known as being complex, opaque, eccentric, even bewildering. No one ever wrote poems like Ashbery before his unique voice burst on the scene in 1956 with *Some Trees*. And while there are now scores of imitators, John remains an authentic poetic genius.

To read an Ashbery poem is to encounter what he termed "the experience of experience." Diction gets consistently rearranged in a typical Ashbery poem, juxtaposed images yield new realities, references multiply, creating yet more references, signifiers are freed from the signified.

But meaning is everywhere and in myriad forms and beneath it all (or perhaps above it all) is intense lyrical beauty. As John once explained to me, "It's all about what we can do with language since language does so much for us."

His death on September 3, 2017, was a personal loss. But it was also a loss to the world of poetry. In no small way, John's passing marks the end of an era in American poetry. He was among the last survivors of that generation that has been dubbed the New American Poets. Included in that diverse group were poets such as Kenneth Koch, Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan, Amiri Baraka, Frank O'Hara, James Merrill, James Schuyler, Adrienne Rich, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, Barbara Guest, Gregory Corso, and the list goes on.

After lunch on that winter day, we returned to John's apartment. "Want to hear the end of my poem?" he asked. "It's a rather long one, so I'll just read you the last section."

The "poem" was *Flow Chart,* which at over 200 pages lived up to his apt characterization. When he read these last lines, I felt a chill in my bones:

…We are merely agents, so
that if something wants to improve on us, that's fine, but we are always the last
to find out about it, and live up to that image of ourselves as it gets
projected on trees and vine-coated walls and vapors in the night sky: a distant
noise of celebration, forever off-limits. By evening the traffic has begun
again in earnest, color coded. It's open: the bridge, that way.

That chill is even deeper now.

More than a decade before John died, I had a dream of James Schuyler, Ronald Firbank (one of John's literary heroes) and John. I reproduce my poem, inspired by the dream, here.

Visitation

For John Ashbery

The three of you are in some light-filled room—
the sort Porter painted—probably in the Hamptons.
Jimmy has summoned the police because you two
have returned unexpectedly from some excursion
to find Ronald sitting there munching macaroons.
You are trying to calm Jimmy. Ronald only looks bemused.
You are explaining that Ronald has come with gifts,
that the door was unlocked, that he can hardly be excused
of breaking and entering, of attempted theft.
Jimmy isn't so sure. "What about the macaroons?"
It isn't that he and Ronald aren't on friendly terms.
It isn't that he wants to make it fuss,
but Ronald's presence disturbs him so—
his cockiness, his elegance, the way he sits there,
sprawled so nonchalantly on the couch, fanning
himself with a tattered book.
Is it Vainglory or A Nest of Ninnies?
You shrug your shoulders, give up the scene,
start to walk into some other room.
You know the cops will come.
You know that for a while Jimmy will sulk, withdraw.

You know that in the end R*onald will stay for dinner.*
Then you turn to me and say:
"It's so difficult living with specters."

Robert Duncan and the Origins of the San Francisco Renaissance

In 1971, my senior year at U.C. Santa Barbara, I was accepted—God knows why—into Kenneth Rexroth's poetry workshop. I had been in Kenneth's larger class, "Poetry and Song," the term before, and regularly attended his Sunday soirees at his home in Montecito. But this class of only ten students was different: Not only was it a poetry workshop where we were required to write five poems each week, it was also a class in contemporary poetry according to Kenneth Rexroth. The textbook was Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry*. Twenty other poetry books were on reserve including: *Opening the Field*, Creeley's *For Love* and Levertov's *O Taste and See*. We read and we wrote, and we occasionally spoke, but mostly we listened to Kenneth tell stories, offer insights, occasionally rant, and when one of us timidly proffered a comment endured his long look, and

then the question we all dreaded: "What makes you think that?"

What I realize now is that Kenneth's true mission was to open worlds to us. And to be honest, he was about the only one doing it at that time in Santa Barbara. The literature faculty was wonderful, with amazing scholars such as Hugh Kenner and Jorge de Sena, but as in most universities in that era, the curriculum totally admitted anything contemporary.

The major focus of Kenneth's delightful rambles was the Poetry Renaissance in Berkeley and then San Francisco. I already knew a little about the scene from my mother who moved to San Francisco in 1944, and as poet wannabe, gravitated toward what was going on in poetry, mainly in Berkeley where she also took classes. I remember her mentioning Miss Gleason and Mr. Rexroth and various poets in their circle who were all, as she put it, "flamboyant homosexuals."

Now that I was taking a class with Kenneth, I asked her more about those I was learning about. Duncan? "Oh yes. Formidable. Magnetic, cross-eyed, very homosexual. His poems were all about history and sex as I remember them." Spicer? "Boisterous but all hunched over. I never understood anything he was doing." Madeline Gleason? "Oh, she was a painter who also wrote some very good poems. Very generous, very warm. But also, very in charge."

Kenneth also remembered my mother: "Oh yes, like Maddie, a redhead who disappeared with a Spanish painter who couldn't speak much English." (The Spanish painter was my father.)

By the end of that quarter, I was seeking out works by Duncan and Spicer, Creeley and Ginsberg, Levertov and Lamantia and a host of others. The San Francisco Renaissance was real to me, enormously intriguing, endlessly nurturing. But what I couldn't quite understand was how it all happened. I'd learned from Hugh Kenner how London and Paris had become vortices for the new, but I couldn't translate from Pound, Eliot, and company, why San Francisco had suddenly become the place where everything, in every direction seemed to have happened within a very short time.

And so, still perplexed, near the end of that term, I asked Kenneth how it all happened. In my notebook from that class, now in my archive at UCSB, I recorded his response:

"How does anything happen?" he shot back. "I guess you made it happen," I replied. "Sorry. Stupid question."

> No," he said. "Not a stupid question. I had something to with it at the beginning. But so did Robert [Duncan] and Maddie [Madeline Gleason] and Jack [Spicer] and Ruth [Witt-Diamant] and Ferlinghetti and others. What you must realize is this. The war scattered everybody, broke apart all the old centers of art and poetry. What nobody realized, particularly those on the East Coast, was that San Francisco after the war had stronger connections with London and Paris than with New York and the poets there were taking their cues from all modern literature. By the mid-50s San Francisco had its own magazines, its own presses, its own literary reputations, but the rest of the country had no idea about this. Readings were not in vogue on the East Coast, but they were in San Francisco. And people went to those readings, and suddenly there was a movement that grew well beyond my living room.
>
> I didn't make it happen. I participated in it. I personally think Robert Duncan had more to do with putting San Francisco on the world poetry map than anyone else. Robert had a reach. He had Black Mountain and Olson and Creeley; he had Pound and H.D.; he had Spicer and Levertov, Helen Adam and Mike McClure; he had Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg. And he and Maddie and Ruth had the San Francisco Poetry Center. He bridged them all, brought them all together in one place at one time. And he spread the word. He wasn't the only one, of course. But he was central."

Flash forward 30 years. Shortly after the publication of my book *The Continual Pilgrimage* I received a letter from Lawrence Ferlinghetti suggesting I write a book for City Lights on the San Francisco Renaissance. He and I had several conversations about it. According to my notes from these calls, Lawrence somewhat downplayed the role of City Lights in making the city a mecca for poets. "City Lights," he said, "prospered from their being a lot going on here. But before City Lights, your old pal Kenneth was organizing readings and talks and Duncan, Broughton, Lamantia, Parkinson, Gleason and Spicer were drawing in a

whole lot of folks. When Ginsberg and Kerouac descended, it all got hotter and more mixed up. But Kenneth and Robert were the forces driving it before and after the Beats."

Again. Robert Duncan as *a,* if not *the* central figure in creating a movement without a leader, a movement without a particular school of thought, a movement that coalesced simply because so much talent was in one place at one time.

I never wrote the book Lawrence proposed, mainly because my agent convinced me that I couldn't do it for the advance Lawrence was offering, but I haven't quite ever let go of attempting to understand how it happened.

What is clear to me now is that until the mid-1940's the Bay Area wasn't on the poetry map at all. Or as Duncan noted, "There was only one poet here when I came back in '42 and that was Kenneth Rexroth, and then there was Philip Lamantia and myself and Kenneth Rexroth."

But then that all changed and changed rapidly. A convergence happened, a kind of vortex that had previously occurred when Pound showed up in London in 1912.

Most who have written about the period note that there was a Berkeley Renaissance before there was a San Francisco Renaissance. There was and there wasn't. To be sure, at the beginning there was more happening in Berkeley, but the bay just isn't that wide. I don't see them as distinct movements. What was going on in Berkeley flowed into San Francisco and flowed back. It was a very moveable feast.

In fact, the so-called Berkeley Renaissance probably actually began in San Francisco somewhere in the fall of 1946 when poets and political outcasts begin to gather on Wednesday nights at Rexroth's apartment on Steiner Street in San Francisco. It was there that Duncan, who had recently returned to Berkeley, met Spicer. Through Spicer, Duncan met Robin Blaser.

Rexroth's gatherings were a mix of politics and poetry. But the discussions of both lingered well after the official evenings ended. Spicer and Duncan became exceedingly close, and the poetry talk continued in a variety of venues, early on at George Leite's Berkeley bookshop, then at the home of Spicer's friends Hugh and Janie O'Neil at 2029 Hearst in Berkeley. But it was hardly a movement beyond a few committed poets,

committed to each other and to forging poems and friendships. It was a time of coming out to each other as poets, of learning, of imitating, of simply hanging out together. Aside from each other, no one else really was aware that much of anything was happening in the houses and bars of Berkeley and Oakland.

Or as Duncan remembered it:

> For the next two years, Spicer and I all but saw each other every day, days of intensive talks and study and writing toward what we thought of as a "Berkeley Renaissance." We wanted a learned poetry, learned not in the terms of the literary world but in the lore of the magic tradition and of the spiritual experience we believed to be the key to the art. This was the period of Spicer's elegies of a black Calvinism, the beginning of his lifelong contention with God, the father, and of my Orphic "Heavenly City, Earthly City" and of my "Medieval Scenes."

But then in April 1947 a movement coalesced in the form of the First Festival of Modern Poetry. It was poet Madeline Gleason's idea, but she had help from Duncan and James Broughton. Over the course of two evenings twelve poets including Rexroth, Duncan, Spicer, Muriel Rukeyser, Broughton, William Everson, and Gleason herself read to a packed room at the Lucien Labaudt Gallery in San Francisco.

Duncan summed up its importance this way:

> In the years of the Poetry Festival, 1947-1952, I came to work in an entente with Madeline Gleason and James Broughton in which my own poetry reflected their work... I sought out Madeline Gleason [in 1945] after friends have given me her first book POEMS....In the first [festival] we found ourselves and begin to hear our poems as belonging to a world of poets working with us, yes, but we also found that there was an audience. We had been told that modern poetry had no readers. That was the decisive message writ large in the 1930s.... Certainly it was in San Francisco that the first audience began.

In early 1948 Duncan moved into a run-down Victorian house in North Berkeley, Throckmorton Manor, and building on the momentum generated by the festival became host to lively gatherings of

poets and fans of poetry. He had readings but also lectures on modern and contemporary poetry. Rexroth, for instance, gave a talk on Williams; Tom Parkinson explained Yeats; Rosario Jimenez introduced the audience to Lorca. While Duncan had long been an organizer of events and was held in esteem by those in the know in the Bay area, with this series he began to emerge as not just a remarkable poet and champion of poetry, but as a mover and shaker. What had been the Rexroth era began to become the Duncan era.

Those making the trek to San Francisco were coming to see Duncan. The yet unpublished Olson arrived with his first wife Connie in 1947, and while he didn't stay long, a profound connection was made between them. Until Olson's death they exchanged letters. Through Olson, Duncan began corresponding with Robert Creeley, Louis Zukofsky, Denise Levertov and Pound.

In 1953 Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Peter Martin opened City Lights Bookstore and Publishers. "It was, of course, an act of faith," Lawrence told me. "But we had a sense that the time was right."

Ferlinghetti's timing was, in fact, masterful. Within a year of the opening of City Lights, the Bay Area was increasingly drawing poets and writers and artists of all stripes. Poetry magazines sprang up: *Circle, Ark, City Lights, Goad, Inferno*, and *Golden Goose.* Along with City Lights Books, Bern Porter Books published Henry Miller, Kenneth Patchen and first books by Lamantia (*Erotic Poems*; 1946), and Duncan: *Heavenly City Earthly City* (1947).

There was now such a swell of interest in poetry that in the fall of 1954 Professor Ruth Witt-Diamant of San Francisco State asked Duncan to teach a series of workshops at the newly created San Francisco Poetry Center. Duncan agreed though he wasn't quite sure what he'd do. But those who signed up to work with Duncan made it easy for him. Among his students were Helen Adam, Michael McClure, Lawrence Fixel, Jack Gilbert, Stan Brakhage, Ida Hodes and even Spicer.

Allen Ginsberg arrived in the city in the fall of 1954 in pursuit of Neal Cassidy. He hadn't been in San Francisco long before he looked up Rexroth. Rexroth promptly introduced him to Duncan. As Allen told it, "Kenneth kind of handed me off to Robert. But that was fine."

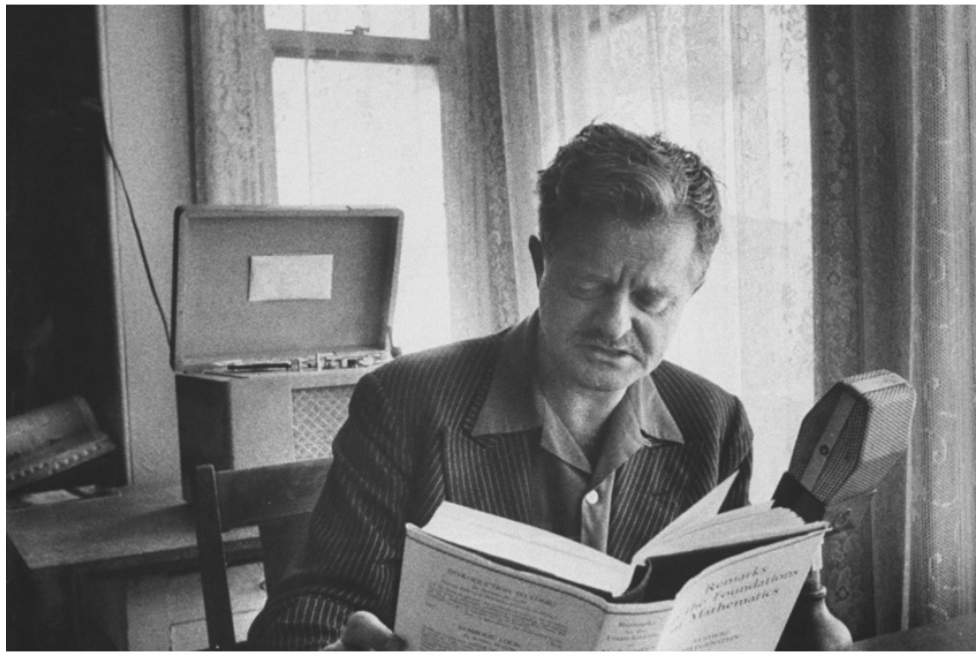
The following January, Ginsberg attended the premier of Duncan's play *Faust Foutu* at the Six

Gallery. Among the many cast members were Helen Adam, McClure, Spicer, and Hodes. Ginsberg was enthusiastic about the play but even more thrilled by Duncan's unscripted performance after the play had ended: "He [Duncan] took off his shirt declaiming, 'This is my body' before the audience." A year later, Ginsberg would imitate Duncan's gesture at a reading in Los Angeles where, in response to a heckler, he removed his clothes on stage shouting "A poet must stand naked before the world!"

Ten months later the Six Gallery would host another reading, this time by the young poet who had sought out Duncan: Allen Ginsberg. This is likely the most famous reading in literary history as Ginsberg premiered *Howl*. Duncan missed the reading as he was in Mallorca visiting Creeley but word of the event, even before the internet, travelled quickly. In a letter to Blaser he wrote: "Well, Ginsberg's HOWL is the San Francisco poem of all poems for 1955-6."

By the time Duncan and Jess returned from Europe in 1956 there was no mistaking that a true poetry renaissance was present in San Francisco. The Beat nucleus was there-- Ginsberg, Kerouac, Gary Snyder. And while Spicer and Blaser had removed themselves for a time to the east coast, the old group—Duncan, Rexroth, Gleason, Broughton, Lamantia, McClure and Adam were still working. Ferlinghetti cranked out *Howl and other Poems* in 1956; three years later Duncan's *Selected Poems* would appear from City Lights as Pocket Poet's Series No. 10.

The field was opening.



Rexroth Memories

Santa Barbara, 1971, my senior year:
the bank we burned the year before
now rebuilt on a ground of ashes.
But because the war was not over
because we were young and determined,
we still swelled the Isla Vista streets,
our protests turning into running battles
against the cops and their clubs and tear gas.

Because we were young and determined
we performed on stage in "Poetry in Song."
Kenneth, in bedroom slippers,
front row center, less a teacher than
a grand master of ceremonies
let his students do every Monday night
whatever they wanted, however they wanted.
I wrote blues songs, protest songs,
performed them as poorly as everyone else.
But then because I was young and determined
I spoofed myself and all the other
ardent ragtag folk singers
by playing a guitar as if it were a saxophone.
After an interminable amount of tuning
I tipped the neck to my mouth,
pumped out with my vocal cords
a few bars of "Perdido."

A few laughed. A few booed.
Kenneth, leaning back in his chair,
guffawed until tears began to run from his sad eyes.
And instead of his usual, "Next,"
bellowed out something about Dada
being the supreme protest.
The next Monday, I played the typewriter
while humming "Railroad Bill."

After the typewriter serenade
I met with him for my second "conference."
The first had lasted five minutes.
I wanted to talk but couldn't.
He didn't want to talk and wouldn't.
A friend said that was the way
it was with Kenneth, at least
that was the way it was with guys.
"He'll only talk to chicks."

But because I was young and determined
this time I came prepared, my grandfather's copy of
The Little Red Songbook in my pocket.
And this time it was different.
We talked about Dada, about Satie
and Reverdy, about Paris and San Francisco
about riding the rails
about the farmworker strikes
and about the war.

I finally produced my grandfather's well-worn book
of union hymns and presented it to him.
His eyes lit up, his drooping mustache
lifted as he smiled.
"I won't keep it," he said.
"It's a present," I said.

He opened it and began to sing.
I sang along.

"Sing 'Railroad Bill,'" he said. "You hummed it
over the typewriter the other night.
I've forgotten the words."

And there in his stark office
in South Hall I sang a few verses.
"Never heard that version," he said.
"Maybe my grandfather
made up those words," I said.
"Then your grandfather was a poet," he said.
Are you?"
I didn't know what to say, just shrugged.
"Bring me some work," he said.
I had scored, and I wasn't even a chick.

Sundays at Montecito
Kenneth supplied the booze and some food.
We supplied the dope.

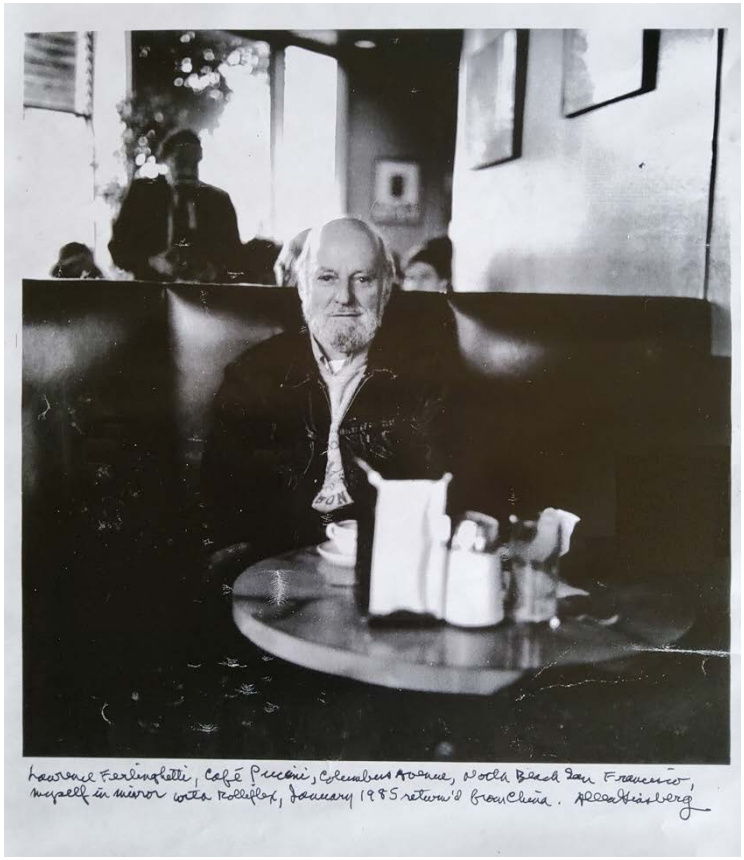
The women supplied themselves.

I usually went with Alice and her dog Thor.
I had the hots for Alice,
she had the hots for Kenneth.
and Kenneth, she claimed, had the hots for her.

We all envied Kenneth.
Envied his fame, his gift, his experience,
envied that at 66 he had far more success
with women than we did. We were
young and determined. He was old and accomplished,
and no less determined. Indomitable. Fierce. Alive.

And then there was that special Sunday
when Kenneth read. Read his Japanese poems,
read "The Heart's Garden, The Garden's Heart."
And as the wind gently blew through the Montecito trees
he read us the poem that would become his epitaph:

"As the full moon rises
the swan sings
in sleep
on the lake of the mind."


Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Café Puccini, Colombus Avenue, North Beach San Francisco,
myself in mirror with Rollflex, January 1985 returned Frenchtown. Allen Ginsberg

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

"Contrary to popular belief, I won't live forever." Those were the last words Lawrence Ferlinghetti said to me when we talked on his 100th birthday. I told him he would because he would always live in our hearts, and in the world of literature. He seemed OK knowing that.

All of Lawrence's adult life was devoted to literature and the arts and social justice and making beautiful things happen. He was an ardent activist; he was a phenomenal publisher and bookseller and editor. He was the rarest of poets in that his books sold in the millions.

He once told me that he never expected to make a dime off his writing. "It just happened. I've never been quite sure why."

He was unfailingly generous, not just to me but to thousands. He always had time to listen and advise. If I left a message on his phone, it would not be long before he returned the call. Postcards and letters arrived regularly in the post: they are now

deposited in my papers at the University of California.

I first met him in 1970. I was then a senior at UCSB and my teacher Kenneth Rexroth was being forced into retirement because of his age. Since at that time we protested everything, we decided to protest Kenneth's termination. But we did it in a unique way: we invited poets to read in honor of Kenneth and to state that poetry mattered, that Kenneth mattered, that his students mattered and that he was a gift to the University.

We wrote Lawrence, and within a few days heard back. "Yes," he wrote. "I'll come and I'll bring a few pals." A week later we heard from Allen Ginsberg who said he was coming, too. So was Gary Snyder and Diane DiPrima.

I think we were all a little surprised. Kenneth wasn't. They all owed him. And poets don't often forget.

We invited the president and the dean to the reading and the dean came. There was an overflow crowd; the reading was stupendous and raucous. After the reading I got to talk a little with Lawrence and with Allen. They said they were both excited to be there, excited as Lawrence said, "to make sure poetry goes on."

Amazingly, the university decided to keep Kenneth on as a special lecturer. We won. Kenneth won. But most of all, poetry won.

in the early 1980s, Lawrence became my editor when City Lights took *Destruction of the Jaguar*, my book of Mayan poems. Lawrence sent my manuscript back with notes scrawled in the margins. That was when I realized that he had a nearly infallible ear. He seemed to catch each place the rhythm was off, where a word just didn't seem right. I took all his suggestions.

I suppose that was truly the start of our friendship which lasted until he died. He, along with Bob Sharrard, edited two of my other books, and Lawrence introduced me at a couple of readings at City Lights. He helped me organize a reading on behalf of Shakespeare and Company in Paris after a fire had scorched part of the famous shop.

Even after I had moved on from City Lights, Lawrence remained a friend. We wrote to each other regularly, occasionally spoke on the phone. He tried very hard to get me to write another book

for him, but at the time I just couldn't do it. I wish I had. I did write about him in my book *The Continual Pilgrimage*. The City Lights reprint is still in their catalogue.

Lawrence, may you rest in poetry. And we will do our best to make sure poetry goes on.

My Pictures from A Gone World

Allen dropping his keys out the window
so we could unlock the door and
ascend those grungy stairs
to his marvelous apartment
and marvel at his marvels.
Or sitting with him for hours at ours
while he raved about Patricia's pasta primavera
amidst handing out advice, telling stories,
interweaving Blake and Whitman
with Kerouac and Trungpa, inquiring about us.
He was tireless and fearless, always wanting
and willing to give of himself.

And Gregory knocking on the door at 7:30
in the morning. "Hey man, got any beer?"
And sitting on a hill overlooking Boulder Creek:
"Don't sweat it, Christopher. Don't sweat the little stuff,
and remember, Christopher, money isn't the big shot."

And William suddenly giving me alarm one afternoon
in the bunker when we'd been talking for several hours
and he suddenly said: "My God what time is it?"
And when I said "4:10," and apologized for staying so
long, he pushed me back in the chair.
"I'm not asking you to leave.
I'm 10 minutes late for drinking time."
Out came the Old Cossack vodka and a liter of Coke.
"Help yourself."
And one evening over dinner witnessing a "routine"
he composed on the spot, taking his cue
from a conversation we'd had about Paul Bowles.
His version featured a Moroccan Halal butcher
he called Dr. Mohammed severing
Paul's great sympathetic nerve complete
with intestines spilled on the floor,
blood coursing from every orifice.
"We'll patch him up. We'll patch him up.
I've got it all under control."

And Lawrence always there for me.
"Count the syllables, count the syllables.

Your ear will know when the line breaks."
"What are you reading?" "I'll get that.
I haven't read that one."
His generosity was unending.
Introducing me at a reading
at City Lights he said only this:
"This is Christopher. He's famous among the famous."
And my mailbox often had a new Ferlinghetti book,
a postcard, a note, or a letter.
"Write what you need to write. Don't pay any attention to anybody else."

All gone now. All gone, yet still here.
Allen told us "Don't grow old. Don't grow old."
And yet we did.

Acknowledgements

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Paul Bowles as I Knew Him was originally given as a keynote address in Lisbon in 2010 at an international conference on Paul Bowles, and later published in *Paul Bowles — The Next Generation: Essays and Criticism*, Anabela Duarte, Ed., (Amsterdam & New York: Editions Rodopi) 2014.

Portions of **Édouard Roditi** were originally published in *Lovesong* (Alyscamps Press, 2021 and in *Witty Partition*, 2022).

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My Pictures from A Gone World was originally published in the *Montague Reporter* in February 2020.

Afterword

Remembrances of Luminaries Past offers just a glimpse of some of the famous writers and literary figures that have been close friends of Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno during a lifetime dedicated to literature and the arts – as a writer, poet, translator, artist, editor, and teacher. There are many other names he might have chosen to include in this book, because he has always earned the respect of significant figures in literature and been able to interact with them as an equal. He has long been "famous among the famous."

Since Chris was a child, literature was in his blood. His mother was a poet, who encouraged him to read and write. Both his parents and grandparents were avid readers. He grew up in homes filled with books – in English, Spanish, German and Swedish. His vision of the world was always international. Barriers, whether they are linguistic or cultural, are meaningless to him. From the earliest age, Chris was read to every night. By the age of five he was reading alone, and at seven he was writing and hand-making books of poems which he illustrated.

He wrote his first novel at the age of ten. It is natural given his background that Chris associates literature with family, with love and friendship. He is a born writer and communicator: and much of his brilliant and incisive prose writing is about other writers. His biographies are classic reference works. For decades he has worked to make important works of literature available in translation from a variety of languages – and thus accessible to new audiences. He has worked with major publishing houses, small presses, and small magazines, online publications, and at international conferences. He has taught and lectured internationally – from Japan to Switzerland, from Turkey to Portugal and beyond.

I clearly remember the early days I spent with Chris in Paris, in 1990, at either Shakespeare and Co. or my shared furnished apartment on the avenue d'Italie, with its stained-glass windows, grand piano and ornate fireplaces. I had chosen that street because of its association with Günter Grass. Our landlord, Regis, was a vegetarian, and so I had to pretend to be one to get the place. I would babysit his dog Scotty, who was a very sad vegetarian himself, staring longingly at the pigeons. I would secretly feed him *jambon de Paris*. That year and the events Chris describes in his essay about George Whitman are as vivid today as when I lived them. The fire at the bookshop was separated by only a few weeks from the sudden, unexpected, death of my mother. One Sunday morning I was downstairs at the grocery store, when one of my roommates came to fetch me. "There's a guy here to see you from Interpol," he said nervously. In the age before cell phones my father had called in a favor from the local police to track me down more quickly. My mother left me a little money; not much at all because we were working class, and she worked as a house-cleaner; but with that and what I earned from George, I saved enough to publish the first book from Alyscamps Press. It was Chris' *The World's Words*.

I already knew other writers before I moved to Paris. I had been involved in bookselling for a few years. I knew Tim Waterstone well and had worked for him. He travelled two hours by train to tell me the news he was selling his chain of bookstores in person, before it became public. It was this event and conversations with David Gascoyne, who once lived on rue de la Bûcherie in the 1930s, translating Breton, Eluard and Dali, and hanging out with Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, and Lawrence Durrell,

that provoked my exodus to Paris in the first place. I already had friendships with publishers John Calder, Marion Boyars, Peter Owen, and Michael Schmidt at Carcanet. I had been introduced to Durrell, with whom I shared a birthdate, by David, who had been his close friend since 1938!

Ferlinghetti and I met in the mid-1980s. I was the one who launched his novel *Love in the Days of Rage*, set during the student uprising in Paris in 1968, in which George and Shakespeare and Co. features prominently. I had first met William Burroughs in Liverpool around 1983, when he was invited over by my friend (and one of my favorite poets), Adrian Henri. I already knew of Bowles and Mrabet through my friends Irving Stettner at *Stroker* magazine, and Peter Owen, who published them. I was a friend of Anaïs Nin's husband Rupert Pole from my teens and had a connection to Edouard Roditi through my bookseller friend Michael Neal. So, long before I met Chris, our web of connections already overlapped significantly. Despite that, when we met, I had never heard his name.

There were many writers I could have asked for a book when planning my first publication, some with a higher profile, but instinctively I knew that Chris and I were destined to always be close and to work together. In the days before *Indesign* and print-on-demand, I learned how to lay out a book with a text Chris wrote, from a printer from the famous print-shop Fricotel, who came by one evening and sat on the floor with me to reveal how it was done. The techniques I learned that night would be used for all the books I published until 1996, when Larry Larson, on the rue Croulebarbe, brought page-layout software into my life. I subsequently have published many books by Chris, and his late wife Patricia Pruitt. These include original books of poems, translations, and prose works. Chris also led me to others whom I published, such as Mark Polizzotti, Sadi Ranson, and Imogene Pruitt-Spence.

When Ray Bradbury used to visit Shakespeare and Company, he and I would sit together at the desk in the evenings, and he would soon gather a crowd of young people whom he would talk with about writing. Sometimes, I would go out for a coffee and leave him to run the desk alone. Ray was nocturnal, and I honestly think George, who went to bed early, never met him. Of course, he is most famous for *Fahrenheit 451*, and there is one quote from that

book I have sometimes thought of in connection to my friendship with Chris.

Ray wrote:

"We cannot tell the precise moment when friendship is formed. As in filling a vessel drop by drop, there is at last a drop which makes it run over; so, in a series of kindnesses there is at last one which makes the heart run over forever."

In the age of Internet, *Facebook* and *Instagram*, people have lost sight of what friendship means. You can friend people on *Facebook* all you like, have hundreds of friends, but still find yourself crying alone in the dark with not a soul to talk to, and no one you can trust. These connections are often friendships in name alone, in some fake non-existent virtual world, in which people lie to others and most of all to themselves. Those who have truly suffered and urgently needed the presence of another know that Van Gogh was correct when he wrote:

"Close friends are truly life's treasures. Sometimes they know us better than we know ourselves. With gentle honesty, they are there to guide and support us, to share our laughter and tears. Their presence reminds us that we are never truly alone."

Friendship, seen through this prism, is what enhances and sometimes saves lives; and gives them a meaning nothing else can. For most of our friendship, Chris and I have been separated by long distances; but it is the daily connection between us, energetic, spiritual, creative, and practical, over decades, that has, as Thoreau said, "made the latitudes and longitudes."

True friends can be as close or closer than family. When my father was dying, he took me, as he often did, to the grave of his friend Nikolaus Wokal, with whom he had fought in Russia during World War Two. Nikolaus never could return home to Ukraine after the War. He never saw his family again; or heard their voices. He died of illness in a small English market town, in 1953. My father paid for his funeral and gravestone. "When I die," my father said, "you will bury me here with Nikolaus. I promised his mother I would never leave him alone and without a friend in a foreign land." And so, I did. United in death, as in life, these friends were family to each other; and after years of facing death

daily side by side, and years bereft of their homelands, they are finally at peace. My father had already discussed this with my mother decades before. She was buried with her mother, just a few meters away.

When writing about friendship, Anaïs Nin once mused:

"Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born."

I believe this is true. It was my meeting with Chris that finally gave me the impetus I needed to push for my dream of becoming a publisher, and to make it reality. He has helped me keep that dream alive for thirty years, through moments of great hardship, and when all hope seemed slim. I did not come from the same kind of intellectual background as Chris. My mother was illiterate, like her father. My father communicated with my mother in his seventh best language, which he had only learned at the age of 28. Ironically, linguistically he had more in common with her mother – with whom he spoke Yiddish (which my mother couldn't understand). My grandmother was descended from Jewish families from Silesia; he came from a remote mountain village in Transylvania.

I did not read anything but the King James Bible and comics until, at the age of thirteen, a teacher noticed that this kid who was always hovering just above the bottom of the class might be smart, but not focused on the right things. He gave me a copy of Slavomir Rawicz's *The Long Walk*, a book beyond my years, about an escape from a Gulag. My aunt Hannah had spent ten years in a Gulag, and it was the first time a book had any connection to my daily life or family. It was this event, and a subsequent month-long trip to Arles, through the local twinning club, that changed my life forever and let the world of literature and the arts flood in. In Arles, my host was busy one day and left me in the care of the sculptor Marino Marini. It was Marini who introduced me to art, sculpture, archaeology, Provençal culture, classical music, and the Alyscamps, once painted by Gaugin and Van Gogh. It was because of him that I fell in love with Provençal literature, and eventually published works by Frédéric Mistral and Folco di Baroncelli, and founded Alyscamps Provençal Library. It was on this day that I learned about the Camargue Cross. I subsequently used this symbol and the

name Alyscamps for the press that I founded. The Camargue Cross symbolizes faith, hope and love, and is a figurative representation of a verse from the Book of Corinthians in the Bible. These three, faith, hope and love, are the foundation of all true friendship. Chris has always had faith in me, offered me hope when I had none, and blessed me with the unconditional love that only true friends can share.

The insightful portraits of writers that Chris offers in this book show his ability to interact with and be close to a wide range of personality types. It also shows his determination to seek out the positive and elevate others. He always offers encouragement and seems to have faith in others beyond that which they can muster for themselves. I never had his talent for community, or his patience with those who were friends, in part, with a vested interest. Ferlinghetti, in Paris, would often ask me to hide his whereabouts from Gregory Corso, because he feared the chaos that Gregorio brought in his wake. George twice went to a secret hotel just to avoid seeing Gregory in person; an aversion put to rest when Gus Reininger brought them together for his film *The Last Beat*. It was a spectacular encounter, with Gregory hamming it up for the cameras, wailing and getting on his knees to beg George for his forgiveness for an argument they had decades before. It was Gregory begging, but both he and I knew it was George who had been at fault. Gus was a former investment banker turned scriptwriter and film producer, writer of *Crime Story*, who inspired Martin Scorsese and Francis Coppola.

I knew Ginsberg peripherally, and we had mutual friends. I organized events for him, but my patience wore thin when he started sending a conga-line of handsome young men to Shakespeare and Co. once he tired of them. Ashbery co-published his translations of Pierre Martory's poems with me, but we did not get along and the relationship soon foundered. Some of the people that George Whitman tolerated at Shakespeare and Co. during my decade there were so obviously parasites and destructive that to me it beggared belief that he could stand them. Even some of those involved in publishing *Fire Readings* eventually fell out, and it was certainly because of Chris that everything held together, and the aims of the venture were achieved. I know some of Chris' friends from the early 1990s in Paris are still close to him but would have no time for me. All this just to say, that Chris has a gift for friendship and for finding common

ground in the world of literature and in life that is very rare. The world is much richer for it. I do not have his courage or his patience. That is my failing.

In recent years, I underwent a cataclysmic experience during which I saw no way out of the darkness, lost everything I owned, and found myself homeless and persecuted, widely seen (and judged) as someone I was not and had never been. I was harried daily for nearly two years. I became suicidal. During this time, I was abandoned by dozens of people who had been part of my social circle for years, some who had stayed in my home, and some of whom I had even taken care of, and who I thought were my friends. Others then pretended to be my friends and consoled me while I wept just to betray me more effectively. At times, I felt that I was going mad, and there was no one I could trust. I became paranoid, but with reason. I dreamed one night of lynching myself, and if I did not it was simply because I knew my persecutors would brand me a coward if I did. I did not want my children to have that legacy. During these years, Chris stood by me steadfastly, despite undergoing many severe hardships himself. He doubtless saved my life. Only a handful of others stuck with me and were there for me by phone day and night during a long confinement. These true friends went above and beyond anything I could have anticipated or hoped for. If I am alive today and publishing this book it is because of them. None of them did more than Chris. In my weakness and despair, I accumulated debts that can never be repaid. But I know that on the day when I leave this world the names of these people will be on my lips. Their friendship and the love they showed me is eternal. Not all those who showed themselves true friends came into my life through literature. That is to be expected, because growing up literature was not part of my world. It is not always true, as P.G. Wodehouse said, that: "There is no surer foundation for a beautiful friendship than a mutual taste in literature." In my own case, it is certain, as Elie Wiesel claimed, that: "Friendship marks a life even more than love."

No one has shown me greater proof of friendship than Chris. I never published his work because he was my friend, but because I believed that every book that he brought to me was necessary, and something I would be proud to work on. When Alyscamps Press finally closes its doors, apart from myself, no one will have done more to give it the place in Paris expat publishing history that it has

than him. If he was always so at home with literary giants it was because, in his own ways, he is exceptional himself. I know how hard it is to find someone who is both an important writer and a man of great integrity and honor. Given a choice between a great man and a great writer, I'll always chose the man. It has been my rare privilege to find them both in him.

Karl Orend

Meudon

Remembrances of Luminaries Past

by

Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno

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This is copy_____.